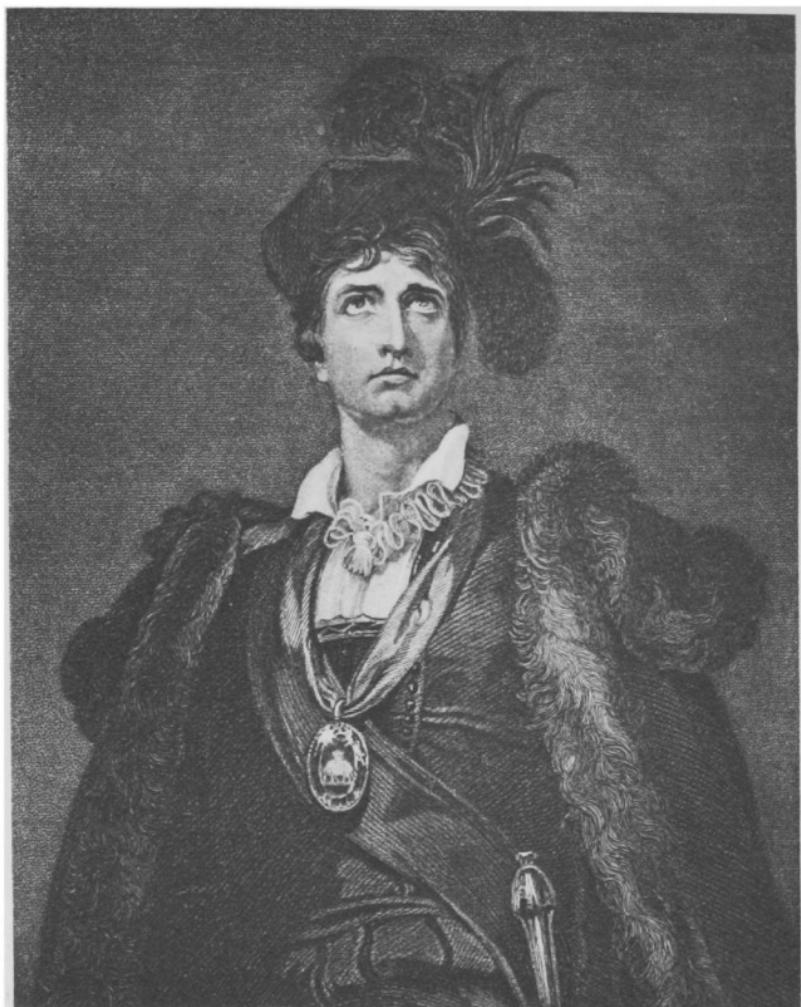


THE KEMBLES
AND THEIR CONTEMPORARIES



JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE
AS HAMLET.

*ACTORS AND ACTRESSES
of Great Britain and the United States*

**THE KEMBLES
AND
THEIR CONTEMPORARIES**

EDITED BY

Brander Mathews and Laurence Hutton

New Illustrated Edition



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GEORGE FREDERICK COOKE.

1756—1812.

By Nature formed in happiest hour, to raise
The fainting energy of former days ;
To lend strong sense each amiable charm,
Sublimely wild or masculinely warm,
Whose fine conceptions ev'ry heart engage,
Then, COOKE, I hail, the Wonder of the Age !
A Meteor, whose abrupt but bright career,
Mocks the dim lustre of each lower sphere.

The ‘ Histriionate.’



GEORGE FREDERICK COOKE
As Richard the Third.

GEORGE FREDERICK COOKE.

George Frederick Cooke, according to his own statement made to his biographer, William Dunlap, was born in the city of Westminster, April 17, 1756. In 1769 he made his first appearance as an actor in a deserted barn in Berwick-upon-Tweed, playing *Young Meadows* in the opera of 'Love in a Village,' and supported by an amateur company of boys of his own age. On this occasion, he confesses in his diary to having indulged in vocal music ; the only time in his life, in public or in private, that he ever permitted himself to sing a song. His professional *début* was made with a company of strolling players at Brentford in 1776, when he played *Dumont* in 'Jane Shore.' His first appearance in London—and for one night only—was at the Haymarket Theatre in the spring of 1778, and in the character of *Castilio* in Otway's tragedy of the 'Orphan.'

For the next twenty-two years Cooke led the traditional stroller's life of that period, alternately feasting and fasting, suffering and joying ; always careless and improvident. He supported Mrs. Siddons, Mrs. Jordan, J. P. Kemble, and other stars in the different provincial theatres, beginning to exhibit the great tragic powers within him, and beginning also to develop the double life he afterwards led ; to become

the two-sided, diametrically opposite man, Cooke sober and Cooke drunk. One week the scholarly, thoughtful gentleman ; the next, a maniac and a sot ; reading the classics, and studying his profession for days and weeks in absolute solitude ; recording moral thoughts and virtuous sentiments in his journal ; and spending days and weeks in debauchery with the lowest companions ; always trying to maintain an absurd dignity in his cups, but always debasing himself below the level of the men he despised ; his own worst enemy, and the cruel, relentless enemy of every decent man and woman who was associated with him, or dependent on him.

On Oct. 31, 1800, and in the forty-fifth year of his age, he took the position he deserved in his profession, and on the metropolitan boards ; appearing in London, at Covent Garden, as *Richard III.* and establishing his fame as one of the greatest actors of his day ; "Never was a reception so flattering," he writes. "Never did I receive more encouraging, indulgent and warm approbation than that night, both through the play and at the conclusion. Mr. Kemble did me the honor of making one of the audience." His second part was *Shylock*, followed by *Sir Archy MacSarcasm*, *Iago*, *Macbeth*, *Kitely*, the *Stranger* and *Sir Giles* ; in all of which he received nothing but praise. Cooke was now at the top of the ladder. Higher he hardly hoped to climb. He was popular, courted and even respected. The responsibility of this position, his ambition to maintain it ; and, above all, his desire to surpass, if possible, Kemble, the Black Jack of all his waking dreams, the man against whom he had entertained the strongest feelings of rivalry

ever since he had played with him in Dublin years before, served to sober Cooke, and to put an unwonted restraint upon him ; and during this first and happy season at Covent Garden he was entirely *himself*. He soon fell from grace, however, and was more than once hissed from the stage for his utter incapacity to go on with his part ; his manager, and friends, and fellow actors being quite unable to control him. On Oct. 3, 1803, Cooke and Kemble appeared together for the first time at Covent Garden, Kemble playing *Richard* and Cooke *Richmond*, amid great excitement and with divided honors. Three days later ‘*Douglas*’ was produced as it has never been seen before or since. Cooke was *Glenalvon*, Kemble *Old Norval*, and Mrs. Siddons *Lady Randolph*. On the 7th the bills announced ‘*Pizarro*,’ with Kemble as *Rolla*, Mrs. Siddons *Elvira*, and Cooke in the titular part ; but Cooke, alas, was utterly unable to walk or talk. His condition, and its cause, were soon apparent to the audience, when staggering to the footlights he pressed his hand upon his breast as if in great pain, and with a most melancholy expression of face said : “Ladies and Gentlemen—the old complaint—the old complaint—!” The curtain fell upon the actor, amidst shouts of derisive laughter, and loud expressions of censure and disgust.

Washington Irving in a letter written late in life thus gives his recollections of Cooke at this period :—

“The finest group I ever saw was at Covent Garden when Cooke after a long disgrace for his intemperance, reappeared on the boards to play *Iago* to John Kemble’s *Othello*. Mrs. Siddons played *Desdemona*, and Charles Kemble *Cassio* beautifully. Kemble had sent

for Cooke to rehearse at his room, but Cooke would not go. ‘Let Black Jack,’ so he called Kemble, ‘come to me.’ So they went on the boards without previous rehearsal. In the scene in which *Iago* instils his suspicions, Cooke grasped Kemble’s left hand with his own, and then fixed his right like a claw on his shoulder. In this position, drawing himself up to him with his short arm he breathed his poisonous whispers. Kemble coiled and twisted his hands, writhing to get away, his right clasping his brow, and darting his eye back on *Iago*. It was wonderful.”

Cooke’s career in England until he sailed for America in the autumn of 1810 can be described in a few words. Occasional fits of sobriety, but only too often—the old complaint—the old complaint. It was during this period that he expressed his famous opinion of the city of Liverpool and its citizens. Called upon by the audience, and very properly, to apologize for unusually irregular conduct on the stage, he cried : “Apology from me ! From George Frederick Cooke ! Take it from this remark : There is not a brick in your infernal town which is not cemented by the blood of a slave !”

On Nov. 21, 1810, Cooke made his first appearance in America at the Park Theatre, New York, as *Richard III.* to the largest audience which had ever assembled in the United States, hundreds being turned from the doors. He was the first great actor who had crossed the Atlantic ; and the excitement and enthusiasm were very great. He played seventeen nights in New York, the receipts reaching the enormous sum of twenty-one thousand five hundred dollars. The old complaint shortened Cooke’s engagements in New

York and elsewhere. He appeared in Philadelphia and in Baltimore, and on July 31, 1812, he stepped from the stage forever at the Boston Theatre after playing *Sir Giles Overreach*. He died in the city of New York on Sept. 20, 1812,—of the old complaint.

Cooke was buried with considerable pomp, his body being followed to a vault in St. Paul's Church, New York, by the bench, the bar, the clergy, the literati and the men of science, as well as by the members of his own profession. In 1821 his remains were removed to an adjoining spot in the churchyard, and over his grave was erected a tomb by Edmund Kean, then playing in America. It was during this interment that Dr. Frances, as related in his 'Old New York,' took possession of Cooke's skull, and Kean secured the finger-joint, which he carried back to England as a talisman for his son Charles. In 1846 the tomb was restored at the expense of Charles Kean, and again in 1874 by E. A. Sothern.

More has been written of Cooke than of almost any other man in his profession, not excepting David Garrick. Every book relating to the drama that has appeared during the last eighty-five years, has contained some account of his genius, or his eccentricity. He has pointed a thousand morals; and he has even adorned a tale, figuring prominently in the 'Water Drinker,' written by his biographer, William Dunlap, and published in 1836. Of the 'Memoir,' published in 1813, Lord Byron wrote—"Such a book!—I believe since 'Drunken Barnaby's Journal,' nothing like it has drenched the press. All green-room and tap-room, drams and the drama—brandy, whisky-punch, and, *latterly*, toddy overflow every page. Two things are

rather marvelous : first, that a man should live so long drunk, and next that he should have found a sober biographer."

It is hard to find in the whole range of biographical literature more melancholy reading than is contained in Mr. Dunlap's two volumes. No man was ever shown to the world in a more sombre and degrading light, than George Frederick Cooke is here painted, and as he has painted himself. And it is greatly to the credit of the stage to-day that no actor of Cooke's habits, no matter how high his position or great his talent, would be tolerated in any theatre in the civilized world. Even genius in this latter part of the nineteenth century must be respectable and self-respecting.

LAURENCE HUTTON.

Cooke, a square-faced, hook-nosed, wide-mouthed, malignantly smiling man, was intelligent and peremptory, and a hard hitter : he seized and strongly kept your attention, but he was never pleasant. He was too entirely the satirist, the hypocrite and the villain. He loved too fondly his own caustic and rascally words, so that his voice which was otherwise harsh, was in the *habit* of melting and dying away inwardly in the secret satisfaction of its smiling malignity. As to his vaunted tragedy, it was a mere reduction of Shakspere's poetry into indignant prose. He limited every character to its worst qualities, and had no idealism, no affections, no verse.

LEIGH HUNT : 'Autobiography,' vol. i., chap. 6.

Cooke was strong, but coarse. He had not the advantage of much education, but had a shrewd penetrating mind, was well acquainted with human nature, and was powerful in those characters for which his talents were adapted, and they were chiefly of the villainous. He thought of nothing but the indulgence of his passions, particularly devoting himself to the bottle. I found him one night in the greenroom during his performance so much affected by liquor, that he was unfit to appear before the audience. He seemed to be melancholy, and when I asked him the cause, he said he had just heard that Mr. Kemble had become a partner in the theatre. "Of course," said he, "I shall be deprived of my characters. There is nobody but Black Jack whom I fear to encounter." I assured him that he mistook Mr. Kemble, who knew his value too well to deprive him of any part. "For his interest," said I, "he would rather bring you more forward. He will revive 'Antony and Cleopatra,' he will be *Antony*, you *Ventidius*. He will be *Othello*, you *Iago*; you *Richard*, he the *Prince of Wales*; you *Shylock*, he *Bassanio*;" and I mentioned other parts in which they might cordially co-operate. These remarks cheered him, and he said, "if so, we will drive the world before us." In the mean time, I plied him with tumblers of water and lessened the effect of the liquor, recommending forbearance of the bottle. He thanked me, and promised to take my advice, went home, immediately returned to his wine, and was rendered so ill that he was confined to his bed the two following days.

JOHN TAYLOR : 'Records of my Life,' vol. ii., chap.
10.

. . . . The theatre was the only amusement which interested me. We were of course desirous of seeing the present nine days' wonder, Mr. Cooke. We were so lucky as to see him in *Richard*, his favorite character. Nature has assisted him greatly in the performance of this part, his features being strongly marked and his voice harsh. I felt at the time that he personated the ferocious tyrant better than Kemble could have done. There is besides a sort of humor in his acting which appeared very appropriate, and which I think Kemble could not have given ; and I think it likely the latter would be surpassed in *Shylock*. Cooke's powers of expression are strong and coarse. I am persuaded that in dignified and refined character—in the philosophical hero—he would fall infinitely short of Kemble. He had the affrontery to play the *Stranger*, but, if I mistake not, he appeared in it but once.

HENRY CRABB ROBINSON : 'Reminiscences,' vol. i.,
chap. 5. 1801.

Mr. Cooke is the Machiavel of the modern stage.
. . . . He can render all his passions subservient to one passion, and one purpose, and can—

Smile, and smile, and be a villain.

Like most statesmen, however, he can do nothing without artifice. His looks and his tones invariably turn him from the very appearance of virtue. If he wishes to be seriously sentimental, he devolves into irony ; if he endeavors to appear candid, his manner is so strange and inconsistent, that you are merely inclined to guard against him the more. It is for

these reasons that his gentleman in sentimental comedy become so awkward and inefficient, that his *Jacques* in 'As You Like It,' instead of being a moralizing enthusiast, is merely a grave scoffer, and that his *Macbeth*, who ought to be at least a majestic villain, exhibits nothing but a desperate craftiness. Of his *Hamlet* one would willingly spare the recollection. The most accomplished character on the stage is converted into an unpolished, obstinate, sarcastic madman. Mr. Cooke is, in fact, master of every species of hypocrisy ; and if he is a confined actor it must be confessed that his powers are always active and vigorous in their confinement. He is great in the hypocrisy that endeavors to conceal itself by seriousness, as in *Iago* and *Shylock*, in the hypocrisy that endeavors to conceal itself by gaiety and sarcasm, as in *Sir Archy MacSarcasm*, and lastly in the most impudent hypocrisy, such as that of *Sir Pertinax MacSycophant* and of *Richard III.*

LEIGH HUNT : 'Critical Essays,' London, 1807.

My remembrance, too, of George Frederick Cooke, whose peculiarities added so much to the effect of his performance, served to detract from my confidence in assuming the crooked-back tyrant. Cooke's varieties of tone seemed limited to a loud harsh croak descending to the lowest audible murmur ; but there was such significance in each inflexion, look, and gesture, and such impressive earnestness in his whole bearing, that he compelled your attention and interest. He was the *Richard* of his day ; and in *Shylock*, *Iago*, *Sir Archy MacSarcasm*, and *Sir Pertinax MacSycophant*, he defied competition. His popularity far excelled that of

Kemble ; but he became the very slave of intemperance, remaining at times for days together in a state of debauch. His habits of inebriety subjected him frequently to the signal disapprobation of his audience, upon whom he would sometimes retort with more vehemence than delicacy. It is reported of him, that on one occasion, when a young officer in the stage-box made himself conspicuous in interrupting the play, Cooke went close up to him, and in his distinctly audible *pianissimo* addressed him : “ D——n you, sir ! You are an ensign ? Sir, the King (God bless him) can make any fool an officer, but it is only the great God Almighty that can make an actor ! ” . . .

His face was only expressive of the sterner emotions, of which a whimsical evidence was afforded one evening, when, something the worse for wine or spirits he had drunk, he volunteered to exhibit to a young man sitting opposite to him the various passions of the human heart in the successive changes of his countenance. Accordingly, having fixed his features, he triumphantly asked his admirer, “ Now, sir, what passion is that ? ” The young gentleman with complacent confidence replied, “ That is revenge, Mr. Cooke.” “ You lie, sir ; it’s love ! ” was Cooke’s abrupt rejoinder. But, when in possession of himself, his manners were most pleasing and his address most gentlemanly. Two of my schoolfellows, Henry and William Hanmer, sons of Sir Thomas Hanmer, in returning from the holidays to Rugby, supped one evening with my father after the play, in which Cooke had been acting. Cooke was of the party. Henry Hanmer, then a young man, subsequently a Colonel in the Guards, was quite charmed with his mild and agreeable

manners and his interesting conversation. As of many others, it used to be said of him, that he was no one's enemy but his own ; a shallow compliment, flattering the easiness of his disposition at the expense of more solid and indispensable qualities.

W. C. MACREADY : 'Reminiscences,' *chap. 3, 1811-12.*

Cooke's representation of the part [*Richard III.*] I had been present at several times, and it lived in my memory in all its sturdy vigor. I use this expression as applicable to him in the character which Cibber's clever stagey compilation has given to an English audience as 'Richard Plantagent,' in place of Shakspere's creation—the earnest, active, versatile spirit, "*impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer,*" who makes a business of his ambition, without let or demur clearing away or cutting down the obstacles to his progress, with not one pause of compunctionious hesitation. There was a solidity of deportment and manner, and at the same time a sort of unctuous enjoyment of his successful craft, in the soliloquizing stage villainy of Cooke, which gave powerful and rich effect to the sneers and overbearing retorts of Cibber's hero, and certain points (as the peculiar mode of delivering a passage is technically phrased) traditional from Garrick were made with consummate skill, significance, and power.

Ibid., chap. 5, 1814-15.

Among the Covent Garden actors must not be forgotten Cooke, who came out there in *Richard III.* For some time he was the greatest performer of this

and a few other characters. He was a new kind of Macklin, and like him excelled in *Shylock* and *Sir Archy MacSarcasm*; a confined actor, and a wayward man, but highly impressive in what he could do. His artful villains have been found fault with for looking too artful and villainous; but men of that stamp are apt to look so. The art of hiding is a considerable one; but habit will betray it after all, and stand foremost in the countenance. They who think otherwise are only too dull to see it. Besides, Cooke had generally to represent bold-faced, aspiring art, and to hug himself in its triumph. This he did with such a gloating countenance, as if villainy was pure luxury in him, and with such a soft inward retreating of his voice—a wrapping up of himself, as it were, in velvet—so different from his ordinary rough way, that sometimes one could almost have wished to abuse him.

LEIGH HUNT : the 'Town,' chap. 7, p. 299.

Cooke, at one period of his life, undoubtedly studied his profession with great attention, and took more than ordinary pains to make himself perfect, not only in the words or general manner but in every minute movement of body and inflection of voice, in those parts from the just representation of which celebrity was to be gained: he had a pure taste—a mind quick to conceive and combine—a discrimination unusually accute—an unrivalled manner of adhering to nature in his recitation—a mode of anticipating, extending and improving the conception of his author—an ability to seize the perfect image of the person he would represent, so as to express every emotion, as if that emotion was his own. . . . Cooke did not possess the elegant

figure of Kemble, but his countenance beamed with great intelligence—his eyes were fiery, dark and at times terribly expressive, particularly of the worst passion of our nature—his voice tho' sharp, was powerful and of great compass, a pre-eminence over Kemble of which he skillfully availed himself—his attitudes were less picturesque than those of Kemble, but they were just, appropriate and natural.

P. GENEST : ‘History of the Stage,’ vol. viii., Covent Garden, pp. 193–194.

First then, Charles, behold George Cooke ; with a person fully up to the middle size, and rather stout, a good stage face, that is, prominent nose, sharp keen eyes, and expressive mouth, but all affected a little by the stamp of habitual intemperance, he was even qualified for the walk in tragedy he generally took ; his principal drawbacks being a somewhat harsh voice, particularly short arms, and a not too graceful carriage.

. I dearly loved Cooke, though he was my idol’s rival, and in some parts a successful one. But the scenes and actors are now [1845] so far removed, that I view them with the same feeling that the historian surveys the events which have now no bearing upon existing party. I now see that the energy and decided genius of Cooke placed him at least upon an equality with Kemble in *Shylock*, *Richard*, *Sir Giles Overreach*, *Kitely*, *John*, *Glenalvon*, and all characters whose villainy was meant to create disgust ; but in the noble walk, where pity was to be stirred, deep grief was to soften, elegance to charm, or lofty bearing to impose, then Cooke was very, very far below Kemble. But his Scotchmen, in my opinion, were his

masterpieces. The dry sarcastic mirth, the perfect concentration of self-good opinion, the inward triumphant chuckle, and sneering *Scotch* laugh of Cooke, were beyond belief fine ! The twirl with his finger and thumb, with which he put *Beau Mordecai* forth, with "Walk aboot, and shew y're shapes, mon," was just as if he had been showing off the tricks of a dancing dog or monkey. Poor George ! the drink ! the drink ! I do not think he would have excelled what he did, if he had been a teetotaller, but he might have continued to do it, and have been always hailed with applause, instead of sometimes being greeted with hisses. He went as high as nature intended him to go.

WILLIAM ROBSON : the 'Old Play-goer,' letter 5.

Tremendous force and rough declamation might be expected from the latter, but when he made his appearance before the audience he was incapable of either speaking or acting. He was in one of those disgraceful and disreputable fits which the indulgence of an audience could then tolerate, and which his example first taught them to tolerate—an example, too, which a player like Edmund Kean was to imitate. Any exhibition of drunkenness is offensive, but a drunken *actor*, staggering about in his stage finery, and hiccuping unintelligible sounds is a revolting spectacle. On this occasion the manager made the conventional apology that Mr. Cooke was really unwell "and unable to proceed." Yet the man had such fine rude power and dramatic genius, coarsely overlaid as it was, that the too indulgent audience readily forgave him.

PERCY FITZGERALD : the 'Kembles,' vol. ii., chap. 6.

No man, when sober, was better conducted, or had more affability of behavior, blended with sound sense and good manners, than Cooke. He had a fine memory, and was extremely well informed. I asked him, when he was acting at Brighton one day, to dine with me and Mrs. Crouch, and we were delighted with his conversation and gentleman-like deportment. He took his wine cheerfully, and as he was going away I urged him to have another bottle. His reply was, "Not one drop more ; I have taken as much as I ought to take. I have passed a delightful evening, and should I drink any more wine, I might prove a disagreeable companion ; therefore, good night ;" and away he went.

MICHAEL KELLY : 'Reminiscences,' vol. ii., p. 239.

Kean had no very exalted opinion of the existing state of the drama. He spoke of Cooke, Mrs. Siddons and Miss O'Neill with veneration and delight. In his opinion Cooke had never been excelled. With the most correct conception and happiest discrimination he combined a power of execution which gave him irresistible control over the human heart. Cooke and Kemble afforded Kean convenient specimens for illustrating his own theory of the art. Cooke was a perfect actor—Kemble a very indifferent one ; the one had spirit and genius—the other would have been a good teacher of elocution, and no more.

N. P. WILLIS, in New York *Mirror*, August 17, 1833.

As regards Cooke, I was at the first performance of Cooke in America. He made a different impression upon me from any other actor I have ever seen ; there

was something so exclusively unique and original in his dramatic genius. He always presented himself to me in the light of a discoverer, one with whom it seemed that every action and every look emanated entirely from himself; one who appeared never to have had a model; and who depended entirely upon himself for everything he did in the character he represented. Cooke reminds me of no one but himself, and I have never been able to recognize the real *Richard* in any other actor than Cooke.

JOHN HOWARD PAYNE, quoted in Gabriel Harrison's '*Payne*,' *chap. 3.*

Mr. Ticknor had often seen Cooke in Boston, and placed his acting above that of any male actor whom he saw in Europe. He saw Cooke in *Shylock* nine times in succession, generally leaving the theatre after *Shylock's* last scene.

'*Life of George Ticknor*,' *vol. i., chap. 3, 1815, foot note.*

It is said that during one of these Boston engagements [of Cooke] a Providence boy, now living, excited by the reports of those who had witnessed the acting of Cooke, and fearing that he would never visit Providence, walked to Boston for want of the means to travel by the usual conveyance, and then beheld the renowned actor, and felt himself compensated for his pains. The delirium of his delight when Cooke actually came to Providence can only be appreciated by those who had the luck to witness the impersonations of that wonderful genius.

CHARLES BLAKE: '*History of the Providence Stage*,' *chap. 6, p. 119.*

S. S. Southworth, the veteran journalist, has recorded the following incident, which occurred at this time [July, 1812]. One of the most honored citizens of the town was Thomas Lloyd Halsey, a man of large fortune, of irascible temperament, and great fondness for theatrical entertainments. He had always been a patron of the theatre, and had supported it with his influence and his purse. His vigorous action in its defence, when its enemies were urging their petitions for its suppression, made him particularly conspicuous. On the night when Cooke was playing *Sir Giles Overreach*—at that point when he is overwhelmed by the production of the forged document—Mr. Halsey became so excited that he involuntarily rose from his seat and ejaculated in the presence of a crowded audience, “Throttle the damned infamous villain!” to the amazement and horror of the whole assembly.

Ibid., pp. 122–3.

Amos M. Atwell took his son Samuel Y., then a young lad, but in after years distinguished as a lawyer, to every one of Cooke’s performances, and when certain acquaintances remonstrated with him for adopting a course so likely, as they said, to create a taste for such an absorbing and deleterious amusement, he answered that it was for the purpose of giving his son a permanent distaste for the stage that he treated him in this unusual manner; “for,” said he, “after the boy has seen Cooke, he will never endure second-rate acting—his theatre days will then be over.”

Ibid., pp. 125–6.

Cooke’s *Shylock*, a new reading for the Western

World, was a most impassioned exhibition. His aquiline nose was of itself a legacy here. The revengeful Jew made his great and successful impression with *Tubal*, and in the trial scene his triumph was complete. *Iago* with Cooke was a more palpable and consummate villain than with any other actor I have subsequently seen. I think I have seen a better *Macbeth*; the transitions of Cooke were scarcely immediate enough for the timid, hesitating, wavering monarch. His *Sir Giles Overreach* was not so terrifically impressive as that of Kean. *Kitely* was an intellectual repast. His *Lear* verified the opinion of Johnson concerning that tragedy. "There is no play," says he, "which so much agitates our passions and interests our curiosity." As a whole, Cooke's performance of the wretched monarch was one of great credit, and possessed points of exquisite conception and felicity, as when he interrogates the Theban philosopher, "What is the cause of thunder?"

Cooke's *Sir Pertinax* for comic force, versatility of features, blandishments, inimitable pliability of address, and perfect personation of character is acknowledged to have greatly surpassed Macklin's. A like tribute is due to his *Sir Archy MacSarcasm*. I believe that no actor in any one part within the compass of the entire drama ever excelled therein to an equal degree as did Mr. Cooke in the Scotch character. The impression created by its representation is too deep to be obliterated while one surviving witness remains. It was his greatest performance, and was rendered the more acceptable by his wonderful enunciation of the Scotch dialect. In one of my medical visits to him at the old Tontine, his first residence in New York, I

incidentally spoke to him concerning his personation of *Sir Pertinax*, and stated that all the town had conceded he was a Scotchman. "They have the same opinion of me in Scotland," said he; "I am an Englishman." "And how, sir, did you acquire so profound a knowledge of the Scotch accentuation?" I rejoined. "I studied more than two and a half years in my own room with repeated intercourse with Scotch society in order to master the Scotch dialect, before I ventured to appear on the boards of Edinburgh as *Sir Pertinax*, and when I did Sawney took me for a native. It was the hardest task I ever undertook."

DR. JOHN W. FRANCIS: 'Old New York,' pp. 207-8.

A theatrical benefit had been announced at the Park, and 'Hamlet' the play. A subordinate of the theatre at a late hour hurried to my office for a skull; I was compelled to loan the head of my old friend George Frederick Cooke. "Alas! Poor Yorick!" It was returned in the morning; but on the ensuing evening, at a meeting of the Cooper Club [Bread and Cheese Club] the circumstance becoming known to several of the members, and a general desire being expressed to investigate phrenologically the head of the great tragedian, the article was again released from its privacy, when Daniel Webster, Henry Wheaton and many others who enriched the meeting of that night, applied the principles of craniological science to the interesting specimen before them; the head was pronounced capacious, the function of animality amply developed; the height of the forehead ordinary; the space between the orbits of unusual breadth, giving proof of strong perceptive powers; the transverse basilar

portion of the skull of corresponding width. Such was the phrenology of Cooke. This scientific exploration added to the variety and gratification of that memorable meeting. [Fenimore] Cooper felt as a coadjutor of Albinus, and Cooke enacted a great part that night.

Ibid., pp. 292-3.

SARAH SIDDONS.

1755—1831.

As when a child on some long winter's night,
Affrighted, clinging to its grandame's knees,
With eager wondering and perturb'd delight
Listens strange tales of fearful dark decrees
Mutter'd to wretch by necromantic spell ;
Or of those hags, who, at the watching time
Of murky midnight, ride the air sublime,
And mingle foul embrace with fiends of hell,
Cold horror drinks its blood ! anon the tear
More gentle starts, to hear the beldame tell
Of pretty babes that lov'd each other dear,
Murder'd by cruel Uncle's mandate fell :
Ev'n such the shiv'ring joys thy tones impart,
Ev'n so thou, Siddons, meltst my sad heart.

CHARLES LAMB.



SARAH SIDDONS.

SARAH SIDDONS.

In the history of no art are there more instances of the passing on of great ability from father to son, and from son to grandson, than in the history of the art of acting. In political life and in literature it is not uncommon to see a son follow in his father's footsteps and sometimes even eclipse his father's fame ; but on the stage it is far more frequent. Instances abound, and there is no need to do more here, than to set down the names of Edmund and Charles Kean, of Junius Brutus and Edwin Booth, and of Charles and Charles James Mathews ; of the Jeffersons there have been five generations on the stage. This is perhaps because there is no profession in which inherited faculty and early training count more for success than they do in the histrionic. In no family has this inherited faculty and this early training given to the world more and greater artists than in the family of the Kemble's. The grandfather and the father of Sarah Siddons, of John Philip Kemble and of Charles Kemble were actors. Henry Siddons, the son of Mrs. Siddons, was an actor, and Fanny Kemble, the daughter of Charles Kemble, was an actress. Six generations of the family have adorned the stage ; and there is no more glorious name in histrionic annals than that of Mrs. Siddons. As Henderson, the actor, said of her when she was

on the threshold of her career, she was an actress who had never had an equal, nor would she ever have a superior.

Sarah Kemble was born July 5, 1755, at Brecknock, in South Wales. Her father was Roger Kemble, a strolling manager and actor; he was a man of high character and good breeding. His wife once said to Boaden, "there sits, unconscious of our remarks, the only gentleman *Falstaff* that I have ever seen." Mrs. Kemble was a daughter of Ward, the actor and manager, who, in 1746, gave a benefit in the Town Hall of Stratford for the purpose of restoring Shakspere's monument. It was from her mother, apparently, that Mrs. Siddons inherited her beauty. As a child she appeared on the stage with the other members of the family. Her father sought to give all his children the advantage of a good education, and Sarah Kemble was as carefully instructed as their circumstances would allow: she was more especially trained in music. "When she was about seventeen," Campbell records, "Mr. Siddons, who was still an actor in her father's company, paid his first attentions to her; and it was soon perceived that they were acceptable." But if acceptable to the young lady, they were not to her parents. Mr. Siddons thought he was to be jilted in favor of a neighboring squire, and he took the audience into his confidence one night, by a song of his own composing, in which he called himself Colin, and bewailed the fickleness of Phyllis; his allusions were so personal and direct, that when he came off the stage, the manager's wife boxed his ears. With the daughter, he soon made it up, and she agreed to marry him whenever her parents would consent. It

was probably to separate the lovers, that Mr. Kemble placed his daughter in a private family, for a while, apparently as a companion or reader. She soon returned to the stage, and to Mr. Siddons ; and at Coventry, Nov. 26, 1773, they were married. Mr. Siddons was a useful actor, ready to play any part at shortest notice, and likely to render it at least acceptably ; but he was not a genius, and his wife was. He made her a devoted husband, and the marriage was happy in all respects.

Two years later, when she was twenty, she was engaged by Garrick, and as *Portia* she made her first appearance at Drury Lane Theatre, Dec. 29, 1775. *Portia* was as unsuitable a character for Mrs. Siddons, as *Shylock* was for King, who acted with her : she made no hit in the part. Garrick was then giving his farewell performances ; he seemed interested in her ; he gave her advice, and tickets to see him act ; when, in May, 1776, he revived the ‘Suspicious Husband’ to play *Ranger*, he cast her as *Mrs. Strictland*—with a line to herself in the bills. She had other parts of no great value, and she played *Lady Anne* to his *Richard III*. Then Garrick retired, and Sheridan, Linley and Ford succeeded him. Plainly enough, Garrick had not seen,—as indeed, how should he ?—what she was capable of ; he seems not to have recommended her especially to the new manager ; and in the summer, while she was acting at Birmingham, she received an official letter from the prompter of Drury Lane, acquainting her, that her services would be no longer required. “It was a stunning and cruel blow,” she wrote, years afterward, in the autobiographic fragment which Campbell used ; “it was very near destroying

me. My blighted prospects, indeed, induced a state of mind that preyed upon my health, and for a year and a half I was supposed to be hastening to a decline."

For six years, Mrs. Siddons remained in the provinces, playing chiefly at York and at Bath, both theatrical towns of high repute, and her reputation increased constantly. Boaden records, that she even ventured to appear as *Hamlet*—just as Miss Charlotte Cushman acted both *Romeo* and *Wolsey*—an effort more curious than valuable. She strove steadily to perfect herself in her art, and she had her reward. In time there came an offer of a three years' engagement, from the new managers of Drury Lane, and for the sake of her children, so she says, she accepted it. She took leave of her friends at Bath, in a poetical address of her own composing, quite as personal as the song of Mr. Siddons of ten years before. She had promised to produce three reasons for leaving Bath, and she kept her word, bringing forward her three children—

These are the moles that heave me from your side,
Where I was rooted, where I could have died.

Mrs. Siddons reappeared at Drury Lane Theatre, Oct. 10, 1782, as *Isabella* in Southerne's 'Fatal Marriage.' During her absence her powers had matured, and her success was instant and indisputable. In the next three weeks, she repeated the part eight times; and on Oct. 30, she appeared in the 'Grecian Daughter.' Then she was seen as *Jane Shore*, and in the 'Fair Penitent' and as *Belvidere* in 'Venice Preserved.' In these she sustained and deepened the impression she had made as *Isabella*; they were all pathetic and

tear-compelling characters, and never before had their tragic force been as well revealed. She became the social, as well as the theatrical celebrity of the hour. She acted eighty nights in that season, and fifty-three in the next, appearing in a greater variety of plays, including two of Shakspere's, 'Measure for Measure' and 'King John,' in which she was *Isabella* and *Constance*. During this second season, Sir Joshua Reynolds painted her as the Tragic Muse. "When I attended him for the first sitting," she wrote, (Campbell, i. 242,) "after more gratifying encomiums than I can now repeat, he took me by the hand, saying, 'Ascend your undisputed throne, and graciously bestow upon me some good idea of the Tragic Muse.' I walked up the steps, and instantly seated myself in the attitude in which the Tragic Muse now appears. This idea satisfied him so well, that without one moment's hesitation he determined not to alter it." When the picture was finished, he told her that the colors would remain unfaded as long as the canvas would keep them together, gallantly adding, "And, to confirm my opinion, here is my name; for I have resolved to go down to posterity on the hem of your garment:" it is to be noted that Sir Joshua very seldom signed his pictures. When Garrick's 'Jubilee' was revived, which was a sort of pageant or procession of the whole company, in the costumes of the chief Shakspearean characters—not wholly unlike the *cérémonie* still seen on set occasions at the Comédie Française—Mrs. Siddons was drawn in a car as the Tragic Muse.

In the succeeding seasons, she appeared as *Lady Macbeth*, as *Queen Katherine* and as *Volumnia* to the

Coriolanus of John Kemble. In the winter of 1789-90, she withdrew from Drury Lane, and acted only occasionally in the provinces. While she was in Birmingham, she was asked to buy a stucco bust of herself; it could not have been a striking likeness, as the shopman did not recognize her. The actress could not help thinking she could do better; and from that time on, she busied herself with sculpture, as Mélingue and Mme. Sarah Bernhardt have done in our day, and as Mr. Jefferson amuses himself with painting. In the Dyce Library at South Kensington, there is her own bust of herself. No doubt the study of sculpture was of use to her, although her attitudes had always been statuesque. Moore records, that she told Lord Lansdowne, "that the first thing that suggested to her the mode of expressing intensity of feeling, was the position of some of the Egyptian statues, with the arms close down by the side, and the hands clenched." Campbell was with her when she first visited the Louvre and saw the Apollo Belvidere; she remained a long time before the statue, and said, at last, "What a great idea it gives us of God, to think that he has made a human being capable of fashioning so divine a form!" She played *Hermione* in the 'Winter's Tale,' March 25, 1802, and, in the great scene, as Campbell says, "looked the statue, even to literal illusion; and, whilst its drapery hid her lower limbs, it showed a beauty of head, neck, shoulders and arms, that Praxiteles might have studied." Boaden declares, that in *Pauline's* chapel, she "stood one of the noblest statues, that even Grecian taste ever invented. . . . Upon the magical words, pronounced by *Pauline*, 'Musick, awake her: strike!' the sudden action of the head,

absolutely *startled*, as though such a miracle had really vivified the marble."

In 1803, John Kemble bought one-sixth of Covent Garden Theatre, and Mrs. Siddons and Charles Kemble joined him. She acted at Covent Garden every season until 1812, when on June 29, she took her farewell in a poetic address, written by her nephew, Horace Twiss. She had been acting in London, at the head of the profession, for thirty years. She emerged from her retirement the next year, to read before the Royal Family, and again the season after to give readings in public at the Argyle Rooms. Her selections were chiefly from Shakspere and Milton : it is to be noted that in 1822, there was published the 'Story of Our First Parents, selected from Milton's Paradise Lost : for the use of young persons'—By Mrs. Siddons. At intervals she was seen again on the stage at benefit performances ; between 1813 and 1819, she acted perhaps twenty times in London and Edinburgh. These occasions were probably a welcome relief to the monotony of her retirement. Mrs. Kemble declares that "the vapid vacuity of the last years of my aunt Siddons's life, had made a profound impression upon me,—her apparent deadness and indifference to everything, which I attributed (unjustly, perhaps) less to her advanced age and impaired powers than to what I supposed the withering and drying influence of the overstimulating atmosphere of emotion, excitement, and admiration in which she had passed her life." Rogers bears witness to the same effect. It is to be remembered that she had lost her husband in 1808, and that one of her sons was dead, and another was away in India ; she told Moore that

she had lost twenty-six friends in six years ; it is small wonder that she was lonely in her old age. She died May 31, 1831, in London, at the age of seventy-six.

Mrs. Siddons was probably the greatest actress the world has ever seen. Her voice was rich and warm and free from the weakness which kept John Kemble constantly on his guard ; Erskine said that he had studied her cadences and intonation, and that to the harmony of her periods and pronunciation he was indebted for his best displays. Boaden declares that there never was a better stage figure than hers. She was strong, supple, graceful and easy in her person. Her face was "so thoroughly harmonized when quiescent, and so expressive when impassioned that most people think her more beautiful than she is." Her intelligence and her industry were equal to her purely physical gifts. Although she had humor in private life, on the stage she failed to reveal it ; her comedy was not mirthful. And she seems to have been a little lacking in variety. But these trifles were all that detracted from her perfection. In youth she gave a pathos to the young and lovely heroines of tragedy that they had never had before ; and in the maturity of her powers she arose to the severe majesty of the highest histrionic genius. She filled exactly Talma's ideal of tragic acting—"the union of grandeur without pomp and nature without triviality." One of her biographers, a critic of long experience and high authority, called her the only perfect *Imogen* that he had ever seen. That she was well nigh perfect as *Constance* also, as *Queen Catherine*, as *Volumnia* and, above all, as *Lady Macbeth*, admits of no doubt now. Of her *Lady Macbeth*, her greatest part, we are fortunate in having her own

analysis (see Campbell's 'Life of Mrs. Siddons,' vol. ii., p. 10), and also in having a careful record of her acting in the character, taken by as competent and exact an observer as Prof. G. J. Bell, and given to the public with an introduction by the late Professor Fleming Jenkin, one of the most original thinkers of our generation and one of the most acute of dramatic critics (see the *Nineteenth Century*, for Feb. 1878).

"Next to the pleasure of running a man down," says Lord Byron, "the critics like nothing so much as vanity of writing him up; but once up, and fixed there, he is a mark for their arrows ever afterwards." It is perhaps the highest possible testimony to Mrs. Siddons's merits as an artist, and to her character as a woman that the only fault found with her was that she was mean and grasping in money matters. The same charge was brought against Mlle. Rachel, and Miss Cushman; and in no case, probably, had it any more basis than the charge of parsimony often urged against Garrick. Her life was written by Thomas Campbell, and he dedicated it to Samuel Rogers, beginning his dedicatory letter with the assertion—"I have often heard you say, that, rare as it was to meet with so gifted a genius as that of Mrs. Siddons, it was almost equally so to meet in human nature with so much candid and benignant singleness of mind as belonged to her personal character." The longer one labors over the abundant records of her life, the more emphatically is one inclined to echo this saying of one poet written down by another.

BRANDER MATTHEWS.

I am unable to state the exact date of Mrs. Siddons' first appearance on the stage, but it must have been very early ; for the company was offended at her appearance of childhood, and was for some time shaken with uproar. The timid *débutante* was about to retire, when her mother with characteristic decision led her to the front of the stage, and made her repeat the fable of the 'Boys and the Frogs,' which not only appeased the audience, but produced thunders of applause.

THOMAS CAMPBELL : 'Life of Mrs. Siddons,' vol. i., chap. 1.

When the moment came for her to appear [Drury Lane, Dec. 29, 1775,] she was quite overwhelmed, and ready to sink on the ground. That most terrible of all known *débuts* for a woman—the coming forth into that vast arena ; the dusky amphitheatre of faces all rising in misty rows above each other ; the multiplied and converging gaze—must leave a feeling as of something most awful. The audience only saw a frail, delicate-looking but pretty creature tottering towards them rather than walking ; her feet and eyes wandering, while a very ugly dress, a faded salmon-colored "sack-back" made her awkwardness even greater. Her voice showed signs of nervousness, and at the close of every sentence it dropped into a hurried whisper : no one could distinctly make out what she was saying. King, who had gone down to report on her, of course carried the burden of the piece through. The criticism of the pit amounted to this, that she was a pretty, awkward and interesting creature, "frightfully" dressed. Towards the trial scene she grew more

collected, and delivered her famous speech with great elocutionary propriety, but still with such a thin, faint voice that much of it was lost. But for the interest of her figure and face it would have been pronounced a failure. Mrs. Siddons herself admitted as much by protesting against the unfairness of such a part being chosen for her.

PERCY FITZGERALD : ‘Lives of the Kembles,’ *vol. i.*, *chap. 4.*

Allowing for her great natural diffidence we see no unpromising presage of her future excellence. We think it one of the most respectable first essays we ever saw at either Theatre Royal. Her figure is a very fine one ; her features are beautifully expressive; her action is graceful and easy, and her whole deportment that of a gentlewoman ; but her *forte* seems to be that of enforcing the beauties of her author by an emphatic though easy art, almost peculiar to herself. Her fears last night prevented her doing justice to her powers, but at times her voice was rather low.

London *Morning Post*, Saturday, Dec. 30, 1775.

“I was truly grieved,” says Mrs. Siddons in her Memoranda, “to leave my kind friends at Bath, and was also fearful that the power of my voice was not equal to filling a London theatre. My friends, too, were also doubtful ; but I soon had reason to think that the bad construction of the Bath theatre, and not the weakness of my voice, was the cause of our mutual fears. On Oct. 10, 1782, I made my first new appearance at Drury Lane, with my own dear beautiful boy [Henry Siddons], then but eight years old, in

Southerne's tragedy of 'Isabella.' This character was judiciously recommended to me by my kind friend, Mr. Sheridan, the father of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, who had seen me play at Bath. The interest he took in my success was like that of a father. . . ." Speaking of her first appearance on this occasion Mrs. Siddons says : " For a whole fortnight before this (to me) memorable day I suffered from nervous agitation more than can be imagined. No wonder ! for my own fate and that of my little family, hung upon it. I had quitted Bath, where all my efforts had been successful, and I feared lest a second failure in London might influence the public mind greatly to my prejudice in the event of my return from Drury Lane disgraced as I formerly had been. In due time I was summoned to the rehearsal of *Isabella*. Who can imagine my terror ? I feared to utter a sound above an audible whisper ; but by degrees enthusiasm cheered me into a forgetfulness of my fears, and I unconsciously threw out my voice, which failed not to be heard in the remotest part of the house by a friend who kindly undertook to ascertain the happy circumstance. The countenances, no less than tears and flattering encouragements of my companions emboldened me more and more ; and the second rehearsal was even more affecting than the first. Mr. King, who was then manager, was loud in his applause. . . . On the eventful day my father arrived to comfort me, and to be a witness of my trial. He accompanied me to my dressing room at the theatre. There he left me ; and I, in one of what I call my desperate tranquillities, which usually impress me under terrific circumstances, then completed my dress, to the astonishment of my attendants,

without uttering one word, though often sighing most profoundly. At length I was called to my fiery trial. I found my venerable father behind the scenes, little less agitated than myself. The awful consciousness that one is the sole object of attention to that immense space, lined as it were, with human intellect from top to bottom, and all around, may perhaps be imagined, but can never be described ; and by me can never be forgotten."

THOMAS CAMPBELL : 'Life of Mrs. Siddons,' vol. i., chap. 4.

Mrs. Siddons, of Drury Lane Theatre, has a lovely little boy about eight years old. Yesterday, in the rehearsal of the 'Fatal Marriage,' the boy, observing his mother in the agonies of the dying scene, took the fiction for reality, and burst into a flood of tears, a circumstance which struck the feelings of the company in a singular manner.

London *Morning Post*, Oct. 10, 1782.

In some of the greatest dramatic characters, Mrs. Siddons needed only to look like her usual majestic self, in order to make you imagine that the poet had written the part for her. Her peculiar element was the sublime and energetic ; and to have seen her *Lady Macbeth* might well inspire an incredulity as to the possibility of the same individual passing, with felicity, from the terrors of *Duncan's* murderer to look the gentleness of *Desdemona*. It is true that the bride of *Othello* is, with all her gentleness, a great being ; and is as resolute in adherence to the noble *Moor*, as she had before been meekly dutious to her father. Moreover,

if it be alleged that love alone makes her bold, be it remembered that her love itself is a high and pure passion, founded on the moral worth of her lord. But still there is a subdued spirit, a lowly violet sweetness in *Desdemona*, that makes me wonder, at this day, how the august Siddons could have personated her as she did even to perfect illusion. I can record the fact that she did so from satisfactory evidence.

Under that head I am far from ranking my own humble testimony; but leaving that to be valued at the reader's will, I beg leave to say that whether she might be greater or not, in other parts, I never wondered at her in any character so much as in *Desdemona*. Miss O'Neill was beautiful in the part, but nothing like Mrs. Siddons. The first time I saw the great actress represent *Desdemona* was at Edinburgh, when I was a very young man (I think it was in 1798). I had gone into the theatre without a play-bill. I knew not that she was in the place. I had never seen her before since I was a child of eight years old; and though I ought to have recognized her from that circumstance and from her pictures, yet I was for some time not aware that I was looking at the Tragic Queen. But her exquisite gracefulness, and the emotions and plaudits of the house ere long convinced me that she must be some very great actress,—only the notion I had preconceived of her pride and majesty made me think that "*this soft, sweet creature, could not be the Siddons.*" When I asked the person next me the name of the actress, I felt, or fancied, a tone of rebuke in his answer; as if he had said, Could you suppose that any other actress could affect the house in this manner? I remember what struck me with peculiar astonishment



SARAH SIDDONS
As the Tragic Muse.

was the familiar, I had almost said playful, persuasiveness, with which she won the *Moor to Cassius'* interest. In that scene, it is my belief that no other actress ever softened and sweetened tragedy so originally.

THOMAS CAMPBELL: 'Life of Mrs. Siddons,' vol. ii., chap. 3.

She [Mrs. Clive] was able to come to town to see the great Mrs. Siddons act. When at the close of the performance she was asked what she thought of this famous woman's playing, she answered : "Think—I think it's all truth and daylight."

FITZGERALD MOLLOY, in the *English Illustrated Magazine*, Nov., 1885.

Mrs. Siddons has, in *Belvidera*, as well as in many other parts, not only attracted the attention, but absolutely fixed, the favor of the town in her behalf. This actress, like a resistless torrent, has borne down all before her. Her merit, which is certainly very extensive in tragic characters, seems to have swallowed up all remembrance of past and present performers ; but as I would not sacrifice the living to the dead, neither would I break down the statues of the honorable deceased to place their successors on their pedestals. The fervor of the public is laudable ; I wish it may be lasting, but I hope without that ingratitude to their old servants, which will make their passion for Mrs. Siddons less valuable, as it will convey a warning to her that a new face may possibly erase the impression which she has so anxiously studied to form, and so happily made. The fervor of Mrs. Siddons is greatly in her favor ; just rising above the middle stature she

looks, walks, and moves like a woman of a superior rank. Her countenance is expressive ; her eye so full of information that the passion is told from her look before she speaks.

THOMAS DAVIES : ‘Dramatic Miscellanies,’ vol. iii., chap. 41.

We found Mrs. Siddons, the actress, there. She is a woman of excellent character, and therefore I am very glad she is thus patronized, since Mrs. Abington, and so many frail fair ones, have been thus noticed by the great. She behaved with great propriety ; very calm, modest, quiet and unaffected. She has a very fine countenance, and her eyes look both intelligent and soft. She has, however, a steadiness in her manner and deportment by no means engaging. Mrs. Thrale, who was there, said, “Why this is a leaden goddess we are all worshiping ! however, we shall soon gild it.”

MADAME D’ARBLAY : ‘Diary,’ Dec. 15, 1782.

But a most formidable ordeal was in preparation for me. Mrs. Siddons, a name that even now excites in me something like a reverential feeling, was on the point of concluding her engagement at Edinburgh, previous to taking her leave of the stage in London. Her way lay through Newcastle, and she engaged to act there two nights. On hearing this some of her friends in the town—and she had many—wrote to her (as she afterwards told my father) requesting she would make *Lady Randolph* one of her characters, my years and ardor suiting so well the part of *Norval*. The plays she fixed on were the ‘Gamester’ and ‘Douglas,’

Norval was a favorite character with me, but *Beverley* I had to study, and with the appalling information that I was to act it with Mrs. Siddons! With doubt, anxiety, and trepidation I set about my work, but with my accustomed resolution to do my very best. The language of the play is prose, and sufficiently prosaic; but I went to work at it with a determined though agitated spirit, and sought out in every sentence the expression that would most clearly illustrate the varying emotions of the character. The words of the part I was soon perfect in; but the thought of standing by the side of this great mistress of her art hung over me *in terrorem*.

After several rehearsals the dreaded day of her arrival came, and I was ordered by my father to go to the Queen's Head Hotel to rehearse my scenes with her. The impression the first sight of her made on me recalled the *Page's* description of the effect on him of *Jane de Montfort's* appearance in Joanna Baillie's tragedy of 'De Montfort.' It was

So queenly, so commanding and so noble,
I shrunk at first in awe; but when she smiled
For so she did to see me thus abashed,
Methought I could have compassed sea and land
To do her bidding.

The words might have been written for this interview, for my nervousness must have been apparent to her on my introduction, and in her grand but good-natured manner she received me, saying, "I hope, Mr. Macready, you have brought some hartshorn and water with you, as I am told you are terribly frightened at me," and she made some remarks about my being a very young husband. Her daughter, Miss Cecilia

Siddons, went smiling out of the room, and left us to the business of the morning.

Her instructions were vividly impressed on my memory, and I took my leave with fear and trembling, to steady my nerves for the coming night. The audience were as usual encouraging, and my first scene passed with applause ; but in the next—my first with *Mrs. Beverley*—my fear overcame me to that degree that for a minute my presence of mind forsook me, my memory seemed to have gone, and I stood bewildered. She kindly whispered the word to me (which I never could take from the prompter), and the scene proceeded.

What eulogy can do justice to her personations ! How inadequate are the endeavors of the best writer to depict with accuracy to another's fancy the landscape that in its sublime beauties may have charmed him ! “The tall rock, the mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood” may have “their colors and their forms” particularized in eloquent language, but can they be so presented to the “mind's eye” of the reader as to enable him to paint from them a picture, with which the reality will accord ? or will any verbal account of the most striking features of “the human face divine” convey a distinct portraiture of the individual ? How much less can any force of description imprint on the imagination the sudden but thrilling effects of tone or look, of port or gesture, or even of the silence so often significative in the development of human passion ! “L'art de déclamation ne laisse après lui que des souvenirs.” As these are not transferable, I will not presume to catalogue the merits of this unrivalled artist, but may point out, as a guide to others, one great excellence that

distinguished all her personations. This was the unity of design, the just relation of all parts to the whole, that made us forget the actress in the character she assumed. Throughout the tragedy of the ‘Gamester’ devotion to her husband stood out as the mainspring of her actions, the ruling passion of her being ; apparent when reduced to poverty in her graceful and cheerful submission to the lot to which his vice has subjected her, in her fond excuses of his ruinous weakness, in her conciliating ex-postulations with his angry impatience, in her indignant repulse of *Stukely’s* advances, when in the awful dignity of outraged virtue she imprecates the vengeance of Heaven upon his guilty head. The climax to her sorrows and sufferings was in the dungeon, when on her knees, holding her dying husband, he dropped lifeless from her arms. Her glaring eyes were fixed in stony blankness on his face ; the powers of life seemed suspended in her ; her sister and *Lewison* gently raised her, and slowly led her unresisting from the body, her gaze never for an instant averted from it ; when they reach the prison door she stopped, as if awakened from a trance, uttered a shriek of agony that would have pierced the hardest heart, and, rushing from them, flung herself, as if for union in death, on the prostrate form before her.

She stood alone on her height of excellence. Her acting was perfection, and as I recall it I do not wonder, novice as I was, at my perturbation when on the stage with her. But in the progress of the play I gradually regained more and more my self-possession, and in the last scene as she stood by the side wing, waiting for the cue of her entrance, on my utterance of the words “ My wife and sister ! well—well ! there

is but one pang more, and then farewell world ! " she raised her hands, clapping loudly, and calling out " Bravo ! sir, bravo ! " in sight of part of the audience, who joined in her applause.

It would not be easy to describe the relief I felt when this trying night was over. The next morning I paid my required visit at her hotel, and going through the scenes of 'Douglas,' carefully recorded her directions, and, in a more composed state than I had been on the previous day, took my leave. I was, in ordinary terms, "at home" in the part of *Norval*, and of course acted with more than usual care and spirit. But who that had ever seen it could forget her performance of *Lady Randolph*? In the part of *Mrs. Beverley* the image of conjugal devotion was set off with every charm of grace and winning softness. In *Lady Randolph* the sorrows of widowhood and the maternal fondness of the chieftain's daughter assumed a loftier demeanor, but still the mother's heart showed itself above all power of repression by conventional control. In her first interview with *Norval*, presented as *Lord Randolph*'s defender from the assassins, the mournful admiration of her look, as she fixed her gaze upon him, plainly told that the tear which *Randolph* observed to start in her eye was nature's parental instinct in the presence of her son. The violence of her agitation while listening to old *Norval*'s narration of the perils of her infant seemed beyond her power longer to endure, and the words, faintly articulated, as if the last effort of a mortal agony, "Was he alive ?" sent an electric thrill through the audience. In disclosing the secret of his birth to *Norval*, and acknowledging herself his mother, how exquisite

was the tenderness with which she gave loose to the indulgence of her affection ! As he knelt before her she wreathed her fingers in his hair, parted it from his brow, in silence looking into his features to trace there the resemblance of the husband of her love, then dropping on her knees, and throwing her arms around him, she showered kisses on him, and again fastened her eyes on his, repeating the lines :

Image of *Douglas* ! Fruit of fatal love !
All that I owe thy sire I pay to thee !

Her parting instructions, under the influence of her fears for her son's safety, were most affectingly delivered. When he had fallen under the treacherous stab of *Glenalvon*, she had sunk in a state of insensibility on his body. On the approach of *Randolph* and *Anna* she began to recover recollection. To *Randolph*'s excuses her short and rapid reply, "Of thee I think not !" spoke her indifference, and disregard of every worldly thing beyond the beloved object stretched in death before her. Leaning over him, and gazing with despairing fondness on his face, she spoke out in heart-rending tones :—

My son !—My son !
My beautiful, my brave !—How proud was I
Of thee, and of thy valor ; my fond heart
O'erflowed this day with transport when I thought
Of growing old amidst a race of thine !

The anguish of her soul seemed at length to have struck her brain. The silence of her fixed and vacant stare was terrible, broken at last by a loud and frantic laugh that made the hearers shudder.

She then sprang up, and, with a few self-questioning words indicating her purpose of self-destruction, hurried in the wild madness of desperation from the scene.

On that evening I was engaged to a ball "where all the beauties"—not of Verona, but of Newcastle—were to meet. Mrs. Siddons after the play sent to me to say, when I was dressed, she would be glad to see me in her room. On going in, she "wished," she said, "to give me a few words of advice before taking leave of me. You are in the right way," she said, "but remember what I say, study, study, study, and do not marry till you are thirty. I remember what it was to be obliged to study at nearly your age with a young family about me. Beware of that : keep your mind on your art, do not remit your study and you are certain to succeed. I know you are expected at a ball to-night, so I will not detain you, but do not forget my word : study well, and God bless you." Her words lived with me, and often in moments of despondency, have come to cheer me. Her acting was a revelation to me, which ever after had its influence on me in the study of my art. Ease, grace, untiring energy through all the variations of human passion, blended into that grand and massive style, had been with her the result of patient application. On first witnessing her wonderful impersonations I may say with the poet :

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken.

And I can only liken the effect they produced on me, in developing new trains of thought, to the awakening power that Michael Angelo's sketch of the colossal

head in the Farnesina is said to have had on the mind of Raphael.

W. C. MACREADY : ‘Reminiscences,’ *chap. 3, 1811-12.*

Her stoutness and bulkiness of person was indeed a serious drawback to the effect of her playing, and it may be suspected that if this blemish had been absent she would have remained some time longer on the stage. In the portraits by Lawrence and others, this imperfection is softened down after the complimentary fashion usual in portraits. But there is an almost too faithful record in existence of her appearance both at this time [1812] and a few years earlier—a compliment to a player which is perhaps unique. When she was in Dublin she made the acquaintance of some clever ladies, daughters of Mrs. Sackville Hamilton, a name well known in Irish society. These young girls seem to have followed the actress with a sort of adoration, and one of them, who was a good artist, filled a large folio volume with elaborate water-color sketches of the great performer. These represented, not only her best and most striking attitudes in the various situations of the play, but all her different changes of dress. Even the costumes she appeared in at private parties are given. But, though the attitudes are remarkable and graceful, this stoutness and almost corpulence leave a grotesque effect, and it interferes even with her most tragic *poses*.

PERCY FITZGERALD : ‘Lives of the Kembles,’ *vol. ii., chap. 10.*

Sir Joshua [Reynolds] often honored me by his

presence at the theatre. He approved very much of my costumes, and of my hair without powder, which at that time was used in great profusion, with a reddish brown tint, and a great quantity of pomatum, which, well kneaded together, modelled the fair ladies' tresses into large curls like demi-cannon. My locks were generally braided into a small compass so as to ascertain the size and shape of my head, which to a painter's eye was, of course, an agreeable departure from the mode. My short waist, too, was to him a pleasing contrast to the long stiff stays and hoop petticoats, which were then the fashion even on the stage, and it obtained his unqualified approbation. He always sat in the orchestra ; and in that place were to be seen, O glorious constellation, Burke, Gibbon, Sheridan, Windham, and, though last, not least, the illustrious Fox, of whom it was frequently said that iron tears were drawn from Pluto's gloomy cheeks. And these great men would often visit my dressing-room after the play to make their bows and honor me with their applause. I must repeat O glorious days ! Neither did his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales withhold this testimony of his approbation.

MRS. SIDDONS, quoted in Campbell's 'Life,' vol. i., chap. 6.

We speak of *Lady Macbeth* while we are in reality thinking of Mrs. S[iddons].

CHARLES LAMB: 'Last Essays of Elia,' on the Tragedies of Shakspere.

Mrs. Siddons had wonderful command of herself on the stage. One night when she was acting *Lady Mac-*

beth in Brighthelmstone in 1809, Charles Kemble, who was *Macbeth*, threw the cup from him in the Banquet Scene with such violence that it broke the arm of a glass chandelier, which stood on the table, and sent it very near to Mrs. Siddons's face—if it had hit her it would have done her a serious injury—she sat as if she had been made of marble.

P. GENEST : 'History of the Stage,' vol. vi., p. 338.

At such a moment of success [as *Lady Macbeth*] with the shouts of the audience in her ears, the careful prudence of the actress is revealed in a most characteristic way : "While standing up before my glass," she says, "and taking off my mantle a diverting circumstance occurred, to chase away the feelings of this night ; for while I was repeating and endeavoring to call to mind the appropriate tone and action to the following words, 'Here's the smell of blood still !' my dresser innocently exclaimed, 'Dear me, ma'am, how very hysterical you are to-night ; I protest and vow, ma'am, it was not blood, but rose-pink and water, for I saw the property-man mix it up with my own eyes.' "

PERCY FITZGERALD : 'Lives of the Kembles,' vol. i., chap. 17.

One memorable night, however, during her engagement, a *contretemps* of a ludicrous nature occurred, for which no part of the audience was answerable. The evening was excessively hot, and Mrs. Siddons was tempted by a torturing thirst to avail herself of the only relief to be obtained at the moment. Her dresser, therefore, despatched a boy in great haste to "fetch a pint of beer for Mrs. Siddons ;" at the same time

charging him to be quick, as Mrs. Siddons was in a hurry for it. Meanwhile the play proceeded, and on the boy's return with the frothed pitcher, he looked about for the person who had sent him on his errand, and not seeing her, inquired, "Where is Mrs. Siddons?" The scene-shifter whom he questioned, pointing his finger to the stage, where she was performing the sleeping scene of *Lady Macbeth*, replied,—"There she is." To the surprise and horror of all the performers, the boy promptly walked on to the stage close up to Mrs. Siddons, and with a total unconsciousness of the impropriety he was committing, presented the porter! Her distress may be imagined; she waved the boy away in her grand manner several times without effect; at last the people behind the scenes, by dint of beckoning, stamping, and calling in half audible whispers, succeeded in getting him off with the beer, part of which in his exit he spilled on the stage; while the audience were in an uproar of laughter, which the dignity of the actress was unable to quell for several minutes.

MRS. MATHEWS: 'Life of Charles Mathews,' vol. i., chap. 13.

She never indulged in imagination at the expense of truth. So anxious was she to adhere to accuracy, that it is well known that when she had to play *Constance* in 'King John' she would speak to no one, but would seat herself between the wings and listen to the machinations of *John* and *Philip*, the better to realize her wrongs, and vent, with greater force and fidelity, her sense of them.

JULIAN CHARLES YOUNG: 'Memoirs of Charles Mayne Young,' chap. 3.

Want of genius could not be imputed to Mrs. Siddons. I did not see her, I believe, in her best days ; but she must always have been a somewhat masculine beauty. She was a mistress, however, of lofty, of queenly, and of appalling tragic effect. Nevertheless, I could not but think that something of too much art was apparent, even in Mrs. Siddons ; and she failed, I think, in the highest points of refinement. When she smelt the blood on her hand, for instance, in ‘ Macbeth,’ in the scene where she walked in her sleep, she made a face of ordinary disgust, as though the odor was offensive to the senses, not appalling to the mind.

LEIGH HUNT : ‘Autobiography,’ *vol. i., chap. 6.*

I had also the further treat of meeting Mrs. Siddons there and having considerable conversation with her at dinner. It was a rich gratification to see the queen of tragedy thus out of her robes. Yet her manner, even in the social board, still partakes of the state and gravity of tragedy. Not that there is an unwillingness to unbend, but that there is a difficulty in throwing aside the solemnity of long-acquired habit. She reminded me of Walter Scott’s Knights, “ who carved their meat with their gloves of steel, and drank their wine through their helmets barred.” There was, however, entirely the disposition to be gracious and to play her part like herself in conversation. She therefore exchanged anecdote and incident, in the course of which she detailed her feelings and reflections while wandering among the sublime and romantic scenery of North Wales and on the summit of Penmaenmawr. As she did this, her eyes kindled and her features beamed, and in her countenance, which is indeed a volume where one may read

strange matters, you might trace the varying emotions of her soul. I was surprised to find her face, even at the near approach of sitting by her side, absolutely handsome, and unmarked with any of those wrinkles which generally attend advanced life. Her form is at present becoming unwieldy, but not shapeless, and is full of dignity. Her gestures and movements are eminently graceful.

PETER IRVING, in the 'Life and Letters of Washington Irving,' Dec. 18, 1813, *vol. i., chap. 17.*

I passed the greater part of this morning with Lord Byron. . . . Soon after I went in, Mrs. Siddons was announced, as in an adjoining parlor. Lord Byron asked me if I should like to see her; and, on my saying I should, carried me in and introduced me to her. She is now, I suppose, sixty years old, and has one of the finest and most spirited countenances, and one of the most dignified and commanding persons I ever beheld. Her portraits are very faithful as to her general air and outline, but no art can express or imitate the dignity of her manner or the intelligent illumination of her face. Her conversation corresponded well with her person. It is rather stately, but not, I think, affected; and, though accompanied by considerable gesture, not really overacted. She gave a lively description of David, the painter; told us some of her adventures in France a year ago; and in speaking of Bonaparte, repeated some powerful lines from the 'Venice Preserved,' which gave me some intimations of her powers of acting. She formed a singular figure by Lady Byron who sat by her side, all grace and delicacy, and this showed Mrs. Siddons's masculine

powers in the stronger light of comparison and contrast.

GEORGE TICKNOR : ‘Life, Letters and Journal,’
June 26, 1815, vol. i., chap. 3.

Of actors, Cooke was the most natural, Kemble the most supernatural—Kean the medium between the two. But Mrs. Siddons was worth them all put together.

LORD BYRON, quoted in Moore’s ‘Life,’ vol. iii., 1814.

Had a good deal of conversation with Siddons, and was for the first time in my life interested by her off the stage. She talked of the loss of friends, and mentioned herself as having lost twenty-six friends in the course of the last six years. It is something to *have had* so many. Among other reasons for her regret at leaving the stage was that she always found in it a vent for her private sorrows, which enabled her to bear them better; and often she has got credit for the truth and feeling of her acting when she was doing nothing more than relieving her own heart of its grief. This I have no doubt is true, and there is something particularly touching in it. Rogers has told me that she often complained to him of the great *ennui* she has felt since she quitted her profession. When sitting drearily alone, she has remembered what a moment of excitement it used to be when she was in all the preparation of her toilette to meet a crowded house, and exercise all the sovereignty of her talents over them.

THOMAS MOORE : ‘Diary,’ 1828.

After she left the stage Mrs. Siddons, from the want

of excitement, was never happy. When I was sitting with her of an afternoon she would say, "Oh dear! this is the time I used to be thinking of going to the theatre; first came the pleasure of dressing for my part, and then the pleasure of acting it; but that is all over now." When a grand public dinner was given to John Kemble on his quitting the stage, Mrs. Siddons said to me, "Well, perhaps in the next world women will be more valued than they are in this." She alluded to the comparatively little sensation which had been produced by her own retirement from the boards, and doubtless she was a far, far greater performer than John Kemble. Combe recollects having seen Mrs. Siddons, when a very young woman, standing by the side of her father's stage, and knocking a pair of snuffers against a candlestick, to imitate the sound of a windmill, during the representation of some Harlequin piece.

'Recollections of the Table Talk of Samuel Rogers.'

Among these, however, there is one anecdote, the repetition of which will be easily pardoned, on account of the infinitely greater interest as well as authenticity imparted to its details by coming from such an eye-witness as Sir Walter Scott:—"I remember," he says, "having seen Lord Byron's mother before she married, and a certain coincidence rendered the circumstance rather remarkable. It was during Mrs. Siddons's first or second visit to Edinburgh, when the music of the wonderful actress's voice, looks, manner, and person produced the strongest effect which could possibly be excited by a human being upon her fellow creatures. Nothing of the kind that I ever witnessed approached

it by a hundred degrees. The high state of excitation was aided by the difficulties of obtaining entrance, and the exhausting length of time that the audience was contented to wait until the piece commenced. When the curtain fell, a large proportion of the ladies were generally in hysterics. I remember Miss Gordon of Ghight [afterwards Mrs. Byron], in particular, harrowing the house by the desperate and wild way in which she shrieked out Mrs. Siddons's exclamation in the character of *Isabella* [the 'Gamester'], "Oh, my Byron ! oh, my Byron !" A well known medical gentleman, the benevolent Dr. Alexander Wood, tendered his assistance ; but the thick-pressed audience could not, for a long time, make way for the doctor to approach his patient, or the patient the physician. The remarkable circumstance was that the lady had not then seen Captain Byron, who, like Sir Toby, made her conclude with "oh" as she had begun with "it."

THOMAS MOORE : 'Life of Byron,' vol. iii., 1815,
foot note.

In the second scene of the second act of 'Coriolanus,' after the victory of the battle of Corioli, an ovation in honor of the victor was introduced with great and imposing effect by John Kemble. On reference to the stage directions of my father's interleaved copy, I find that no fewer than 240 persons marched, in stately procession, across the stage. In addition to the recognized *dramatis personæ*, thirty-five in number, there were vestals, and lictors with their fasces, and soldiers with the spolia opima, and sword-bearers, and standard-bearers, and cup-bearers, and senators, and silver eagle bearers, with the S. P. Q. R. upon them, and

trumpeters, and drummers, and priests, and dancing-girls, etc., etc.

Now, in this procession, and one of the central figures in it, Mrs. Siddons had to walk. Had she been content to follow in the beaten track of those who had gone before her, she would have marched across the stage, from right to left, with the solemn, stately, almost funereal, step conventional. But, at the time, as she often did, she forgot her own identity. She was no longer Sarah Siddons, tied down to the directions of the prompter's book ; she broke through old traditions—she recollects that, for the nonce she was *Volumnia*, the proud mother of a proud son and conquering hero. So that, when it was time for her to come on, instead of dropping each foot at equi-distance in its place, with mechanical exactitude, and in cadence subservient to the orchestra ; deaf to the guidance of her woman's ear, but sensitive to the throbings of her haughty mother's heart, with flashing eye and proudest smile, and head erect, and hands pressed firmly on her bosom, as if to repress by manual force its triumphant swellings, she towered above all around, and rolled, and almost reeled across the stage ; her very soul, as it were, dilating, and rioting in its exultation ; until her action lost all grace, and, yet, became so true to nature, so picturesque, and so descriptive, that pit and gallery sprang to their feet, electrified by the transcendent execution of the conception.

JULIAN CHARLES YOUNG : 'Memoirs of Charles Mayne Young,' chap. 3.

I was at Edinburgh one year when she was electrifying the Northern Metropolis with many characters,

but with none more than this. One of her fellow performers, Mr. Russell, told me an instance of her power in the part. A poor fellow who played the *Surveyor* in ‘Henry VIII.’ was met by Mr. Russell coming off the stage, having just received the *Queen Katherine’s* rebuke, “You were the Duke’s surveyor, and lost your office on the complaint o’ the tenants.” The mimetic unjust steward was perspiring with agitation. “What is the matter with you?” said Mr. Russell. “The matter,” quoth the other, “that woman plays as if the thing were in earnest. She looked on me so through and through with her black eyes, that I would not for the world meet her on the stage again.”

THOMAS CAMPBELL : ‘Life of Mrs. Siddons,’ vol. ii., chap. 6, foot note.

He [Dr. Johnson] this autumn received a visit from the celebrated Mrs. Siddons. He gives this account of it in one of his letters to Mrs. Thrale, October 27 :

“Mrs. Siddons, in her visit to me, behaved with great modesty and propriety, and left nothing behind her to be censured or despised. Neither praise nor money, the two powerful corruptors of mankind, seemed to have depraved her. I shall be glad to see her again. Her brother Kemble calls on me, and pleases me very well. Mrs. Siddons and I talked of plays ; and she told me her intention of exhibiting this winter the characters of *Constance*, *Katherine*, and *Isabella*, in Shakspere.”

Mr. Kemble has favored me with the following minute of what passed at this visit :

When Mrs. Siddons came into the room, there

happened to be no chair ready for her, which he observing, said with a smile, “Madam, you who so often occasion a want of seats to other people, will the more easily excuse the want of one yourself.”

Having placed himself by her, he with great good humor entered upon a consideration of the English drama; and, among other inquiries, particularly asked her which of Shakspere’s characters she was most pleased with. Upon her answering that she thought the character of *Queen Katherine* in ‘Henry the Eighth’ the most natural:—“I think so, too, Madam,” said he; “and whenever you perform it, I will once more hobble out to the theatre myself.” Mrs. Siddons promised she would do herself the honor of acting his favorite part for him; but many circumstances happened to prevent the representation of ‘King Henry the Eighth’ during the Doctor’s life.

JAMES BOSWELL: ‘Life of Johnson,’ 1783, *aet.* 74.

Mrs. Siddons most nobly played her part of *Margaret of Anjou* [‘Earl of Warwick’]. The character is one to which she can still render justice. She looks ill, and I thought her articulation indistinct, and her voice drawling and funereal during the first act; but as she advanced in the play her genius triumphed over natural impediments. She was all that could be wished. The scene in which she wrought up the mind of *Warwick* was perfect. And in the last her triumphant joy at the entrance of *Warwick*, whom she had stabbed, was incomparable. She laughed convulsively, and staggered off the stage as if drunk with delight; and in every limb showed the tumult of passion with an accuracy and a force equally impressive to the

critic and the man of feeling. Her advancing age is a real pain to me. As an actor she has left with me the conviction that there never was, and never will be, her equal.

HENRY CRABB ROBINSON : 'Reminiscences,' April 4, 1811, vol. i. chap. 14.

June 29, 1812, was fixed for her last appearance, and, as may be imagined, *Lady Macbeth* was the appropriate character. It was an exciting scene ; the theatre was crammed to overflowing ; the applause and sympathy were almost tumultuous. The excitement took an almost unprecedented shape, and when "the sleep walking scene," as it was called, was concluded, the audience stood upon the benches and insisted on the play ending there. The complimentary wish was gratified and the curtain was let down. This was a favorite custom in Dublin, in the instance of great players even on ordinary nights ; and on this occasion there were many who complained of it, and were dissatisfied. When the curtain next rose, the great actress was discovered dressed in white, and seated at a table. She came forward to receive an impassioned greeting, and, with emotion delivered the address written for her by her nephew Mr. Horace Twiss. . . .

She was much agitated ; and at the conclusion her brother John came forward to lead her away. Then the curtain descended slowly, and shut her out from what, after all, must be one of the most seductive and entrancing worlds, compared with which, all the placid enjoyments of well-earned rest and retirement must seem tame and insipid. But for one like her who commanded applause, and secured perhaps the

highest appreciation ever awarded to an actress, it must have been almost like a foretaste of death. In this way, close on sixty years ago, the English stage lost its greatest actress. Whatever stars may be destined to rise, it is almost certain that none will be admitted to be her equal.

PERCY FITZGERALD : 'The Kembles,' vol. ii., chap. 10.

Mrs. Siddons, unfortunately, did not burst upon me when she first came upon the stage, as Kemble did. I was present the first night of her return to the stage when she acted for the benefit of the theatrical fund I risked my limbs to see her, as the rush and the crowd was so great ; but I got a most excellent place. She acted *Mrs. Beverly*, and I was not only charmed and every way interested, but at times astonished. The grace of her person, the beauty of her arms, the mental beauty of her face, the tragic expression of her voice, and the perfect identification with the character, left nothing for me to wish for. In these she was so great, that even her unwieldy figure, which at first somewhat annoyed me, was soon forgotten.

JOHN HOWARD PAYNE : 'Letters.' London, June 19, 1817 ; Gabriel Harrison's 'Payne,' chap. iii.

COVENT GARDEN, JUNE 9, 1819.—No circumstance connected with the drama has excited so strong an interest during the present season as the return of Mrs. Siddons to the stage, though but for this evening, when that distinguished ornament of the British stage appeared in the character of *Lady Randolph*, in Home's tragedy of 'Douglas,' for the benefit of her

brother, Mr. C. Kemble. Years have neither robbed her countenance of its dignified beauty, nor her genius of its force. All her powers of expression are still in their youth ; all the feelings of the audience still at her command. The whole of the performance elicited boundless applause, and when the curtain fell admiration was mixed with profound regret. . . . All the deficiency we discover in Mrs. Siddons, and it is so obvious that such deficiency must exist, that it is almost invidious to point it out, is, the mere want of physical power, and of certain failures of tact, which is only to be retained by continued practice.

European Magazine, June, 1819.

The theatres, no less than the public, were taken by surprise upon the advertisement of Charles Kemble's benefit. "The Queen of Tragedy," Mrs. Siddons, had consented to appear once again upon the stage ! To those who had enjoyed the privilege in former days of appreciating the displays of her transcendent genius, and who, in her performance of *Lady Macbeth* in 1817, had been regretful witnesses of the total decline of her physical powers, the announcement was an unwelcome one. Her admirers, jealous of her fame, felt it an injustice to herself, and blamed Charles Kemble for soliciting the sacrifice from her. His purpose was, however, fully answered by the thronged attendance of all ranks to get a parting sight of the greatest actress of her own or perhaps of any time. The play was 'Douglas.' How ineffaceably impressed on my memory was her matchless personation of the widowed mother seven years before ! I then was the young *Norval*, now Charles Kemble's character.

Young retained old *Norval*, and *Glenalvon* remained of course with me. Mrs. Siddons appeared June 9th, "for that night only," as *Lady Randolph*. On her former reappearance as *Lady Macbeth* there had not been one salient point to break the sombre level of the unimpassioned recitation. On this night there was a gleam of the "original brightness," in which many like myself no doubt rejoiced, as calculated to afford to those who had not known her days of triumph some slight glimpse of the grand simplicity and force of her style. When, as *Glenalvon*, I stood intently riveting my gaze upon her, as she uttered her threatening caution regarding *Norval*, she paused ; then fixing her eyes sternly upon me, in a tone of insulted dignity and with a commanding air, continued :

Thou look'st at me as if thou fain would'st pry
Into my heart,"

concluding with the majestic confidence of truth :

'Tis open as my speech.

The effect was electric, and the house responded with peals of applause. But this was as the last flicker of the dying flame ; no flash enlightened the succeeding scenes. Her powers were no longer equal to those bursts of passion in which, with unrivalled skill, she had formerly swayed at will the feelings of her audience. Those who have only known the painting of Guido in the faint and watery colorings of his pencil's later productions (characterized by *cognoscenti* as his "feeble manner"), could scarcely give the artist credit for such works as the Martyrdom of St. Peter, the Aurora, the Madonna at Bologna, and other

marvels of his art, which won him renown in his earlier and happier day. Still less could they who had been present at no other performance of Mrs. Siddons than these two last attempts have formed any idea of the matchless fidelity with which the passions of our nature could be portrayed, or have remotely conceived of the point of sublimity to which her wonderful powers of expression could raise the poet's thought. In no other theatrical artist were, I believe, the charms of voice, the graces of personal beauty, and the gifts of genius ever so grandly and harmoniously combined.

W. C. MACREADY: ‘Reminiscences,’ *chap. 12, 1818–19.*

This [parsimony] was the weak place of both brother and sister ; and after this we are scarcely surprised to hear that when the son of Mrs. Siddons asked his mother and uncle to play for him she agreed to do so on her favorite terms—half the receipts and a free benefit ; whilst his uncle’s answer was precisely to the same effect.

PERCY FITZGERALD : ‘Lives of the Kembles,’ *vol. i., chap. 18.*

Mrs. Siddons was a great simple being, who was not shrewd in her knowledge of the world, and was not herself well understood in some of the particulars by the majority of the world. The universal feeling towards her was respectful, but she was thought austere. Now, with all her apparent haughtiness, there was no person more humble when humility morally became her. I have known her call up a servant whom she

found she had undeservedly blamed, and beg his pardon before her family. She had a motherly, affectionate heart. Hundreds of her letters have been submitted to me; and though her correspondence has disappointed me, in being less available than I could have wished for quotation, yet, in one respect it delighted me by the proofs which it gave of her endearing domestic character. In not one of her notes, though some of them were written on subjects of petty vexation, is there a single trace of angry feeling. From intense devotion to her profession she derived a peculiarity of manner, of which I have the fullest belief she was not in the least conscious, unless reminded of it;—I mean the habit of attaching dramatic tones and emphasis to commonplace colloquial subjects. She went, for instance, one day into a shop at Bath, and after bargaining for some calico, and hearing the mercer pour forth an hundred commendations of the cloth, she put the question to him: "*But will it wash?*" in a manner so electrifying as to make the poor shopman start back from his counter. I once told her this anecdote about herself, and she laughed at it heartily, saying: "Witness truth, I never meant to be tragical."

THOMAS CAMPBELL: 'Life of Siddons,' vol. ii.,
chap. 13.

JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE.

1757—1823.

Fair as some classic dome,
Robust and richly graced,
Your Kemble's spirit was the home
Of Genius and of Taste—
Taste like the silent dial's power,
That when supernal light is given,
Can measure inspiration's hour,
And tell its height in heaven.
At once ennobled and correct,
His mind surveyed the tragic page,
And what the Actor could effect,
The Scholar could presage.

THOMAS CAMPBELL.

JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE.

John Philip Kemble was the eldest son of Roger Kemble, whose eldest child became famous as Mrs. Siddons. He was born on Feb. 1, 1757, at Prescot in Lancashire. As a child he acted with the strolling company which his father managed: but as Roger Kemble did not intend any of his children for the stage, the boy was sent first to a Roman Catholic seminary, at Sedgeley Park, in Staffordshire, and later to the English college at Douay, where he was to be qualified for the priesthood. Boaden records that at Douay, when for some indiscretion there was an imposition on the class of two books of Homer, Kemble volunteered, "and by close application and his uncommon memory, enabled himself to remove the censure, by accurately repeating at least 1,500 lines." He was foremost in getting up scenes from plays, a means of instruction often in favor in institutions controlled by the priesthood; and he was remembered as *Brutus* and as *Cato*. He seems to have studied to advantage, but he felt called to the stage, and before he was nineteen he left school and returned to England. On Jan. 8, 1776, at Wolverhampton, he made his first appearance as an actor, playing *Theodosius* in a forgotten tragedy of that name. Early in October, 1778, he joined the famous York company under the management of Tate Wilkinson. Here he acted many leading

parts in comedy and tragedy. For his benefit on Dec. 29, 1778, he brought out a tragedy of his own, 'Belisarius'; and on April 10, 1779, a comedy of his, the 'Female Officer,' was acted at the benefit of a fellow-actor. In 1780, he published at York a volume of 'Fugitive Pieces,' the forty-two pages of which contained copies of verses in English and Latin, several prologues and epilogues, a Latin epitaph for Mr. Inchbald—the husband of the dramatist—and also an English ode to his memory. After a stay of three years he left the York company and went to Dublin, making his first appearance Nov. 2, 1781, as *Sir George Touchwood* in the 'Belle's Stratagem,' a hopelessly unsuitable character. In the English provinces and Ireland, Kemble had occasion to show that he was a gentleman, and that he was prepared to defend his position as such, with dignity and courage.

At last, when he was twenty-six years of age, his path being made smooth for him by Mrs. Siddons's success, he was engaged at a London theatre. A few days before John Philip Kemble made his first appearance at Drury Lane, his brother, George Stephen Kemble, performed *Othello* at Covent Garden—but without success: this did not interfere with the elder brother's reception as, in Boaden's words, "the incident seemed to turn itself into a joke against the manager of the rival theatre, who had engaged the *big* instead of the *great* Kemble." John Kemble made his first appearance in London, on Sept. 30, 1783, as *Hamlet*: as he had seen no great actor in the part, his view of the character was in great measure his own, and not a few of his readings differed from those of Garrick, and of Henderson, who had succeeded Garrick

as the accepted *Hamlet*. It is evidence of the impression made by the young actor that his impersonation was violently discussed by the critics, and that the manager of Covent Garden promptly brought forward Henderson as *Hamlet*: and so Kemble acted *Hamlet* in rivalry with Henderson, then the foremost actor of the English stage, just as Garrick and Barry had been rival *Romeos* a generation before. During his first season in London he appeared also as *Richard III.*, and as *Sir Giles Overreach* in ‘A New Way to pay Old Debts’—not equalling Henderson in either character and yet gaining ground with the public and with the critics. Later in the season he acted with Mrs. Siddons, for the first time in London, playing *King John* to her *Constance*. Boaden notes that at this period he did not think the performances of John Kemble “equal in effect to those of Mrs. Siddons. Their talents, although they bore a strong family resemblance, differed considerably as to their power, and, in some respects, character. The organ of the brother was weaker than his sister’s; he was, besides, very far indeed from his meridian.” Apparently, John Kemble’s genius ripened slowly. The young actor was ambitious, energetic, and well educated; he had the desire for improvement and the faculty of study; and he labored long and earnestly to improve himself in his profession, neglecting nothing. Boaden makes the fine distinction that Henderson “varied less from himself than any great actor of his time,” as “his memory was amazingly tenacious, and he had early made up his mind as to the characters he acted;” while, “Kemble, on the contrary, seemed to me always to consider the work as still *to do*: he never dismissed a part from his

study, as having given to all *all* the consideration he was capable of. To the last of him, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* had still, as he conceived, calls upon him for improvement." It was this willingness to study *ohne Hast, ohne Rast* which raised Kemble to his final and indisputable eminence.

During his first summer recess he appeared at Liverpool and Manchester, with his brother George Stephen. The next year he first acted *Othello* in London. On December, 1787, he married Mrs. Brereton, who was the widow of a fellow actor and who, as Miss P. Hopkins had been the original *Maria* in the 'School for Scandal :' the marriage, although Mrs. Siddons did not approve of it, was suitable and it gave happiness to both parties. Six weeks later, Jan. 21, 1788, Kemble acted *King Lear* for the first time, Mrs. Siddons playing *Cordelia*. "I have seen him since in the character," Boaden wrote, "but he never again achieved the excellence of that night." Kemble's *Lear* was at once accepted as second only to Garrick's,—and *Lear* was perhaps Garrick's greatest triumph. In the five years of his London engagement Kemble had risen rapidly ; proof of this may be seen in the offer to him of the management of Drury Lane Theatre under Sheridan, who was already engrossed by politics. The author of the 'School for Scandal' was even then busy with the impeachment of Warren Hastings and he was beginning to be neglectful of the stage save as a source of income. In October, 1788, Kemble became Manager and he held the position, with a brief interval, until 1801, struggling with the accumulating indebtedness and disorder due to Sheridan's want of thrift. Kemble had already begun

that fine collection of English plays which came in time to rival Garrick's in its comprehensiveness, and which he sold ultimately to the Duke of Devonshire for £2000. He gave close attention to the scenery and costuming of Shakspere, on whose plays he wished the theatre chiefly to rely. As Charles Lamb said, John Kemble believed all the good plays had been written : he had, at least, tired of the regularity with which the new tragedies failed—and tragedy, of a truth, was then at its last gasp. He told Boaden that while "showy afterpieces and laughable farces might be necessary" from contemporary authors, the dramatists of the past were the main prop of the theatre : and he persuaded Sheridan to let him produce Shakspere with stronger casts and with more elaborate and more accurate scenery and appointments. While new pieces were sometimes well mounted, any old scenery and any old dresses had been thought good enough for the stock-plays—and Shakspere's were stock-plays. The costuming was often incongruous and absurd : Kemble himself had dressed *Othello* in the coat of a British general, but with Turkish trousers and turban. When he became Manager an effort was made towards the historical exactness which was to be carried to extremes fifty years later by Charles Kean.

Kemble was content to act the plays of Shakspere, and the accepted tragedies of the preceding generation—now carefully forgotten, all of them. Towards the new dramas by new men, he was not hostile, perhaps, but he maintained an attitude of armed neutrality. Yet circumstances forced him to appear in not a few new plays, in some of which he was abundantly successful. In Colman's 'Mountaineers' he was

a most effective *Octavian*; but in Colman's 'Iron Chest' he failed as dismally as did the drama itself. Colman published the play with a preface in which Kemble was scourged with the most savage satire; and then he gave the piece another chance at his own theatre, the Haymarket, with Elliston as *Sir Edward Mortimer*; it revealed a semblance of life, and although it is a deadly dull drama, Junius Brutus Booth used to act it effectively; and more recently, Mr. Edwin Booth and Mr. Henry Irving have been seen in it. The 'Iron Chest' was founded on Godwin's 'Caleb Williams'; but Godwin's own 'Antonio' met with no better fate, and is recalled now only because of Lamb's delightful account of its damning. In the pseudo-Shaksperian 'Vortigern,' Kemble had to say one line :

And when this solemn mockery is o'er.

which marked the climax of the noisy turbulence with which the fraudulent tragedy was received. But in two of the newer dramas, both adapted from Kotzebue, whose plays were then prevalent everywhere, Kemble made the most emphatic successes of his career. These were the 'Stranger,' translated by Benjamin Thompson, but touched to life by the skillful hand of Sheridan, and 'Pizarro,' arranged by Sheridan, who had strengthened, with patriotic passages from his own speeches, the part of *Rolla*, which Kemble performed. Despite the enormous profits made by the popularity of 'Pizarro' the finances of Drury Lane became more and more involved. Kemble and Mrs. Siddons had great difficulty in drawing their pay. They determined to make a change, and on June 24, 1802,

Kemble appeared for the last time at Drury Lane. He spent the next year on the Continent, visiting Spain and remaining a while in Paris.

In 1803 John Philip Kemble bought one-sixth of Covent Garden for £23,000. The whole value of the patent, the house, the wardrobe, the scenery, the machinery, the stage properties, etc., being taken as £138,000. Kemble came to Covent Garden as Manager under Harris. He brought with him Charles Kemble and Mrs. Siddons, with her son and daughter-in-law. He made his first appearance there Sept. 24, 1803, as *Hamlet*; it was just twenty years since he had made his first appearance at Drury Lane in the same part. He retained George Frederick Cooke, his chief rival, and even played *Richmond* to Cooke's *Richard III*. During the winter of 1804-5, Kemble was thrust aside by the inexplicable furor for Master Betty, the infant *Roscius*, an infatuation which subsided rapidly after the first season. On Nov. 3, 1806, Kemble brought out 'Coriolanus,' and presented perhaps his most moving and magnificent performance.

Five years after Kemble had bought into Covent Garden, on Sept. 20, 1808, the theatre was burnt to the ground. The insurance was insufficient; and the Duke of Northumberland, unsolicited, at once lent Kemble £10,000 to aid in the rebuilding; and on the laying of the corner-stone of the new house the Duke sent him back the bond, cancelled. The expense of the new theatre forced the managers to raise the prices to certain parts of the house, and this was resisted by the more turbulent of the public, who clamored for the Old Prices. These O. P. riots lasted for sixty-six nights, and were finally terminated by a compromise.

After Mrs. Siddons's retirement from the stage in June, 1812, her brother took a vacation, making a long visit to Ireland. He reappeared in January, 1814, only a few days before the first performance in London of Edmund Kean, the only actor who seriously challenged his supremacy toward the end of his career. Three years later, March 29, 1817, he took his farewell of the Edinburgh stage with a poetical address written by Sir Walter Scott; and on June 23d, he acted at Covent Garden Theatre, performing *Coriolanus* for the last time. Four days later a public dinner was given to him, at which Lord Holland presided. Talma made a speech in English, and Young recited the poem which Campbell had written for the occasion. After thirty-four years of life in London, Kemble went for rest, first to Toulouse, then to Italy and Switzerland, and finally settling down at Lausanne. There he died of apoplexy on Feb. 26, 1823, at the age of sixty-six.

"We feel more respect for John Kemble in a plain coat, than for the *Lord Chancellor* on the woolsack," said Hazlitt, expressing the opinion of all old playgoers. Kemble belonged beyond all question to the grand school. His style was stately and academic almost to the verge of frigidity, but if he was ever lacking in fire, he was never wanting in force. Coleridge considered that "Dryden's genius was of that sort which catches fire by its own motion; his chariot wheels get hot by driving fast;" and as much might be said of Kean's genius. Kemble's had rather the splendor of a towering iceberg: it was awful in its effect, massive and overpowering. His grandest character was perhaps *Coriolanus*, in the mighty dignity

and force of which he has probably never been surpassed. In *Hamlet* he was without a peer; Lamb declares that "it was difficult for a frequent playgoer to disencumber the idea of *Hamlet* from the person of Mr. K.;" and Mr. Matthew Arnold, a careful and thoughtful critic of the theatre, writing as "An Old Playgoer," says that "all *Hamlets* whom I have seen dissatisfy us in something. Macready wanted person; Charles Kean, mind; Fechter, English; Mr. Wilson Barrett wants elocution. Perhaps John Kemble, in spite of his limitations, was the best *Hamlet* after all." Assuredly, Kemble did not want person, or mind, or English, or elocution—indeed, these were four qualifications for the part he had in union beyond all other actors. He was a handsome man, with his full share of the Kemble beauty; "how very like his sister!" was the general exclamation when he made his first appearance in London. Boaden said, "he had the finest head, perhaps, that has ever been seen," and the beautiful mezzotint from Lawrence's portrait, prefixed to Boaden's biography, bears him out in this assertion. That Kemble had mind, needs no evidence now; the high intelligence which directed all his work is proof enough. In his English, he was exact and precise; his pronunciation was punctilious almost to an extreme; he made a dissyllable of "aches" when the meter and old usage suggested the so doing; and, when urged by the Prince of Wales he corrected the Prince's Frenchified pronunciation of "oblige." His supremacy as a master of the art of elocution was never seriously disputed.

Although he was seen at his best in characters of classic simplicity, and although his *Hamlet* and his *Coriolanus*

were far superior to his *Richard III.*, yet as Dr. Doran notes, the new parts in which he was most successful were romantic more often than not, the *Stranger*, for example, and *Rolla* and *Octavian*. While he was unapproached in the height of tragedy, and unrivalled in less exalted melodrama, his comedy was sadly to seek, if we may judge by the epigram, which referred to his performance in the 'School for Scandal,' as *Charles's Martyrdom*: yet Lamb did not think ill of him in the part. He was a skillful and conscientious arranger of Shakspere's plays, and an adroit adapter from the French. In private he had humor of a most unexpected turn; he would condescend to play marbles in the street with little boys, and he would make a grandiloquent oration to the stage hands before giving them a guinea to drink his health; and his sense of humor was strong enough to let him see the point of a joke even when it pierced his own side. To sum up: he is one of the very greatest figures in English histrionic history; and his career was an honor to himself, as his character was an honor to his profession.

BRANDER MATTHEWS.

The late Mr. William Lewis, himself an excellent comic actor and a shrewd judge of theatrical merit, told me that as he once passed through an obscure town in Yorkshire, to perform as "a star," he saw John Kemble in the part of *Lovewell*, in the 'Clandestine Marriage,' ill-dressed for the character, with antiquated finery, unsuitable to a merchant's clerk, and with black, unpowdered hair; yet, notwithstanding the

stiffness of his deportment, he displayed so much good sense and judgment, that Mr. Lewis assured me he silently predicted Mr. Kemble would rise into theatrical distinction.

JOHN TAYLOR: 'Records of My Life,' vol. i., chap. II.

Mr. Kemble's person is tall and manly, but not so athletic as to deprive it of elegance. His limbs are well proportioned, and his figure graceful. He seems to have studied the graces, but there was a little too much complaisance and solemnity of bowing in the fencing scene [as *Hamlet*]. The contour of his face much resembles Mrs. Siddons; and many of his particularities, for so they may be called, are strangely like hers. By particularities are here meant, not inconsistent with, but beautiful in a representation of Nature; and they come under the head of *Particularities* because they are not common on the stage in tragedy. Mr. Kemble's excellence is not confined to *Hamlet*. In the *Count of Narbonne*, we are assured, he seems to rise above himself; and in many others he has very uncommon merit, particularly in *Sir Giles Overreach*, *Demetrius*, *Beverley*, *Orestes*, *Richard*, *Macbeth* and the *Earl of Warwick*. In a word, he is the best actor that has graced the Irish stage for many years, and which is more to his praise his private conduct is as worthy as his public talents are extraordinary.

The *Universal Magazine*, Dublin, October, 1783.

Mr. Phillips being confined by the gout, had requested Mr. Kemble to conduct his daughter home

after the play was over, during his confinement. One evening, however, some young officers, belonging to a regiment quartered in that city, chose to contend for the honor of seeing the beautiful Miss Phillips safe to her lodgings ; and accordingly, when she went to her dressing room, stationed themselves in the passage through which she was obliged to return, and as they were rather more elevated than, perhaps, they might have been *before* dinner, they disputed concerning their rights to the temporary honor of being her conductor so loudly, that the fair subject of their dispute locked herself into her dressing-room ; and when Mr. Kemble sent to inform her that he was waiting for her, she replied to his messenger, through the door, that she would not leave her room till the officers had quitted the theatre, as she was resolved not to pass them. Upon this they were politely desired to quit the passage, in which they had stationed themselves, as the doors of the theatre were going to be shut. They said they would not leave the house till Miss Phillips did, as they were waiting to attend her. Mr. Kemble, hearing this, took his sword, and, passing through them, said, with dignity and firmness—"Gentlemen, Mr. Phillips, who is confined by illness, has requested me to conduct his daughter from the theatre ; and, as gentlemen, I trust you will not molest her ; for be assured, I shall maintain the trust reposed in me." He called Miss Phillips, and told her, that her father was anxious for her return, as it was late, and assured her that she would pass without interruption. The trembler, scarcely assured, ventured forth ; but, when she beheld the officers, would have ran back to her room if Mr. Kemble had not held her fast,

and said—"Be under no apprehension, I am resolved to protect you from interruption. If any gentleman is dissatisfied with my behavior, I will meet him, if he pleases, to-morrow morning, and if he can prove it to be wrong, I shall be ready to apologize for it." This firm and manly conduct rather checked the violent spirit of the contenders, who suffered Miss Phillips to pass with her calm and fearless protector. But in the morning, the commanding officer, having heard of the confusion his inferior officers had occasioned, called on Mr. and Miss Phillips, and told them that he was extremely sorry any persons under his command should act so unbecoming the character of gentlemen, and assured them that the aggressor or aggressors, should make whatever public apology they required. Miss Phillips told him, that all she required was, that in the future the gentlemen would go from the theatre with the rest of the audience, and leave her to go home quietly with her father, or whoever he should appoint to conduct her. This was promised ; and, during her stay in the city of Cork, was strictly adhered to. Mr. Kemble's prudent, yet spirited conduct, on that occasion, was highly spoken of, even by those whom it restrained when reason regained her dominion over their senses.

M. J. YOUNG : 'Memoirs of Mrs. Crouch,' vol. i., pp. 186-9.

Kemble was a god compared with Cooke, so far as the ideal was concerned ; though on the other hand, I could never admire Kemble as it was the fashion to do. He was too artificial, too formal, too critically and deliberately conscious. Nor do I think he had

any genius whatever. His power was all studied acquirement. It was this indeed, by the help of a stern Roman aspect, that made the critics like him. It presented in a noble shape the likeness of their own capabilities.

LEIGH HUNT : 'Autobiography,' vol. i., chap. 6.

Kemble came with me to Suffolk Street ; and had I not seen it, I could not have thought it possible : while we were waiting dinner for Mr. Sheridan, Kemble studied the prologue, which consisted of fifty lines, and was perfect in every word of it before dinner was announced ; a powerful proof of his retentive memory and quick study, for, to my certain knowledge, he had it not in his possession, altogether, more than an hour and a half.

I have often heard him say that he would make a bet that in four days he would repeat every line in a newspaper, advertisements and all, *verbatim*, in their regular order, without misplacing or missing a single word.

MICHAEL KELLY : 'Reminiscences,' vol. ii., pp. 63-4.

In the memorable time of the O. P. riots, some of the actors belonging to Covent Garden seemed to enjoy the disagreeable situation in which Kemble, as manager, stood. I was one night in Covent Garden Theatre, when one of them absolutely and roundly asserted, that Kemble was but an indifferent actor. Cooke was in the greenroom at the time, and I said, "What do you think of the assertions of those gentlemen, Mr. Cooke ; do you think Kemble an indifferent actor ?"

"No, sir," he replied ; "I think him a very great one, and those who say the contrary are envious men, and not worthy, as actors, to wipe his shoes." It gave me unspeakable pleasure, to hear him give so liberal an opinion of my esteemed friend, even though the expression of it was somewhat of the coarsest.

MICHAEL KELLY : 'Reminiscences,' *vol. ii.*, pp. 239-40.

One of the Aickens—"brethren in mediocrity," as Lamb called them—was studiously rude to him at table ; and after much forbearance, Kemble resented this treatment and agreed to give the offender "satisfaction." The two actors met outside Marylebone attended by old Bannister, when Kemble coolly received his adversary's fire and declined to return it. The histrionic dignity that sat so well on him at the footlights always attended him off the stage. He had already fought Mr. Daly, the Irish manager, and in fact was "called out" no less than four times. But there was more dignity, as well as morality in his rebuke to a foolish play-writer, who was connected with the aristocracy—the Hon. Mr. St. John—who had written one of the innumerable 'Mary Queen of Scott' plays and was impertinent to the manager in the greenroom. High words followed. "You are a person I cannot call out," said Mr. St. John insolently. "But you are a person I can turn out," was the ready reply ; "and you shall leave this place at once !"

PERCY FITZGERALD : the 'Kembles,' *vol. i.*, *chap. 20*.

We feel more respect for John Kemble in a plain coat, than for the Lord Chancellor on the woolsack.

He is surrounded, to our eyes, with a greater number of imposing recollections : he is a more reverend piece of formality ; a more complicated tissue of costume. We do not know whether to look upon this accomplished actor as *Pierre* or *King John* or *Coriolanus* or *Cato* or *Leontes* or the *Stranger*. But we see in him a stately hieroglyphic of humanity ; a living monument of departed greatness ; a sombre comment on the rise and fall of kings. We look after him till he is out of sight, as we listen to a story of one of Ossian's heroes, to "a tale of other times."

HAZLITT: On Actors and Acting in the 'Round Table.'

My music master, as distinguished from my singing master, was a worthy old Englishman of the name of Shaw, who played on the violin, and had been at one time leader of the orchestra at Covent Garden Theatre. Indeed, it was to him that John Kemble addressed the joke (famous because in his mouth unique) upon the subject of a song in the piece of 'Richard Cœur de Lion'—I presume an English version of Grétry's popular romance : "O Richard, O mon Roi!" This Mr. Shaw was painfully endeavoring to teach my uncle, who was entirely without musical ear, and whose all but insuperable difficulty consisted in repeating a few bars of the melody supposed to be sung under his prison window by his faithful minstrel, Blondel. "Mr. Kemble, Mr. Kemble, you are murdering the time, sir!" cried the exasperated musician ; to which my uncle replied, "Very well, sir, and you are forever beating it!"

FRANCES ANN KEMBLE: 'Records of a Girlhood,'
chap. 3.

Precise in passion, cautious ev'n in rage,
Lo ! Kemble comes, the Euclid of the stage ;
Who moves in given angles, squares a start,
And blows his Roman beak by rules of art ;
Writhes with a grace to agony unknown,
And gallops half an octave in a groan.
His solemn voice, like death-bell heard afar,
Or death-watch clicking in an old crackt jar,
He measures out monotonous and slow,
In-one-dull-long-sing-song-to-joy-or-woe.
This stoic sameness nothing can remove ;
Nor will his rigid hamstrings bend to love.
John Kemble see in all the parts you will,
Lear, Romeo, Richard —'tis John Kemble still.
The 'Thespiad,' 1809.

No piece was, perhaps, ever so completely cast in all its parts as this *manager's comedy* [the 'School for Scandal']. Miss Farren had succeeded to Mrs. Abington in *Lady Teazle*, and Smith, the original *Charles*, had retired when I first saw it. The rest of the characters, with very slight exceptions, remained. I remember it was then the fashion to cry down John Kemble, who took the part of *Charles* after Smith ; but, I thought, very unjustly. Smith, I fancy, was more airy, and took the eye with a certain gaiety of person. He brought with him no sombre recollections of tragedy. He had not to expiate the fault of having pleased beforehand in lofty declamation. He had no tins of *Hamlet* or of *Richard* to atone for. His failure in these parts was a passport to success in one of so opposite a tendency. But, as far as I could judge, the weighty sense of Kemble made up for more

personal incapacity than he had to answer for. His harshest tones in this part came steeped and dulcified in good-humor. He made his defects a grace. His exact declamatory manner, as he managed it, only served to convey the points of his dialogue with more precision. It seemed to head the shafts to carry them deeper. Not one of his sparkling sentences was lost. I remember minutely how he delivered each in succession, and cannot by any effort imagine how any of them could be altered for the better. No man could deliver brilliant dialogue—the dialogue of Congreve or of Wycherley—because none understood it, half so well as John Kemble. His *Valentine* in ‘Love for Love,’ was, to my recollection, faultless. He flagged sometimes in the intervals of tragic passion. He would slumber over the level parts of an heroic character. His *Macbeth* has been known to nod. But he always seemed to me to be particularly alive to pointed and witty dialogue. The relaxing levities of tragedy have not been touched by any since him; the playful court-bred spirit in which he condescended to the players in *Hamlet*, the sportive relief which he threw into the darker shades of *Richard*, disappeared with him. He had his sluggish moods, his torpors; but they were the halting-stones and resting-place of his tragedy—politic savings and fetches of the breath—husbandry of the lungs, where nature pointed him to be an economist—rather, I think, than errors of the judgment. They were, at worst, less painful than the eternal tormenting unappeasable vigilance,—the “lid-less dragon eyes,” of present fashionable tragedy.

CHARLES LAMB: on the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century, in the ‘Essays of Elia.’

With Mr. John Kemble I have long and happily enjoyed a familiar intercourse. No man knows more, or better, whatever relates to the History of the Drama; no man possesses more copious, or more valuable materials; no man communicates what he knows and possesses, to his friends, with greater or more agreeable facility.

WILLIAM BELOE: 'Anecdotes of Literature,' *Preface.*

Upon the whole Mr. Kemble appears to be an actor of correct rather than quick conception, of studious rather than universal or equal judgment, of powers some naturally defective but admirably improved, and others excellent by nature but still more so by art; in short, of a genius more compulsive of respect than attractive of delight. He does not present one the idea of a man who grasps with the force of genius, but of one who overcomes by the toil of attention. He never rises and sinks in the enthusiasm of the moment; his ascension, though grand, is careful, and when he sinks it is with preparation and dignity. There are actors who may occasionally please more, but not one who is paid a more universal or profound attention.

LEIGH HUNT: 'Critical Essays,' London, 1807,
p. 15.

I can never forget Kemble's *Coriolanus*; his *entrée* was the most brilliant I ever witnessed. His person derived a majesty from a scarlet robe which he managed with inimitable dignity. The Roman energy of his deportment, the seraphic grace of his gesture, and the movements of his perfect self-possession displayed

the great mind, daring to command, and disdaining to solicit, admiration. His form derived an additional elevation of perhaps two inches from his sandals. In every part of the house the audience rose, waved their hats, and huzzaed, and the cheering must have lasted more than five minutes.

JOHN HOWARD PAYNE, Letter from London, June 19, 1817; Gabriel Harrison's 'Payne,' *chap. 3, pp. 68-9.*

In the impassioned scene, between *Hamlet* and his mother, in the third act, Kemble's emphasis and action, however different from those of all former *Hamlets* we have seen, bore the genuine marks of solid judgment and exquisite taste. I never saw an audience more deeply affected, or more generously grateful to the actor who so highly raised their passions. Mr. Kemble is tall and well made; his countenance expressive, his voice strong and flexible, his action and deportment animated and graceful. His salutations are said by some to be too much studied, and in the scene of fencing too formal and ceremonious.

THOMAS DAVIES: 'Dramatic Miscellanies,' vol. iii., *chap. 38.*

Kemble was the great actor of his day—it is impossible to conceive a finer figure for Roman characters than he was—*Coriolanus* was his great part—*Hamlet*—*King John*—*Cato*—*Petruchio*—*Leon*—*Zanga*—*Wolsey*—*Hotspur*—*Octavian*—*Duke*, in 'M. for M.'—*Penruddock*—*The Stranger*—*Jaques*—*Rollo*—*De Montfort*—*Leontes*—*King*, in 'Henry IV., Part Second,'—*Pierre* and *Brutus* were among his best characters. In

Richard III. he was generally considered as inferior to Cooke.

P. GENEST : 'History of the Stage,' vol. viii., Covent Garden, p. 615.

His [Cooke's] style of acting did not differ more from that of John Kemble than did his theoretical opinions from those of that distinguished ornament of the stage. He thought that Kemble's performances were very splendid specimens of improved elocution, but not personations of character. I believe this was his sincere opinion, and that his decision was in no wise influenced by jealousy or professional rivalry.

The Mirror, New York, Aug. 17, 1833.

At last, Garrick victorious through life over every competitor, retired in his turn ; and then Mr. John Kemble arose, and gave to the stage a model for classic grace, for Roman heroism, and stoic pride. With all the dignity of Quin, he surpassed him in characters where more than mere voice or figure was demanded, as in *Penruddock* and the *Stranger*, where deep touches of human feeling link the misanthrope to the man ; or, as in *Macbeth*, where the spirit is not degraded, by education, or habit, or its own weakness, below the human sympathies ; but sublimated beyond them, and raised to preternatural grandeur, by intercourse with creatures of a more potent order. In these, Mr. Kemble exhibited the pathos of the one, and the wild solemn abstraction of the other, in a manner that would have borne comparison with any actor.

BARRY CORNWALL : 'Life of Kean.' *Introduction.*

I reached my destination some days before my engagement began, and without delay settled myself in comfortable quarters in Suffolk Street, where I had a spacious drawing-room and good bedroom at a moderate rent ; being “done for,” in lodging-house phraseology, by my landlady, Mrs. Rock. My early arrival enabled me to be a witness of the farewell performance of John Philip Kemble on the Dublin Stage ; an opportunity I could not be expected to neglect. It may indeed be readily supposed that I went to find a seat in the theatre on that evening under the agitation of no common curiosity. The audience was not what I had anticipated on the occasion. In theatrical parlance, it was what would be termed “respectable,” but not numerous. The house was about half filled, and I obtained a very convenient place in the first circle of boxes. I should with difficulty have believed, if told, that such would be the case on the announcement of the last appearance “previous to his final retirement” of so distinguished an actor ; but here was an instance of the caprice of public favor. In former visits to Dublin Kemble had been greatly followed. In this engagement, his last, the theatre was indifferently attended. The popularity of Kean, who had in the preceding summer acted for several weeks to overflowing houses, may have served to have exhausted enthusiasm, and to have cast into shade the past glories of Kemble’s triumphs here, exemplifying the truth of Shakspere’s lines :

For time is like a fashionable host,
That slightly shakes his parting guest by the hand ;
And with his arms outstretched, as he would fly,
Grasps in the comer.

Whatever the cause, the fact is as I record it. An apathy pervaded the playgoing world, and the manager's calculations were disappointed, and, in the hope of rousing the public from the torpor that appeared to possess them, Kemble had consented to reappear in characters which he had long since relinquished and which were among the *chefs-d'œuvre* of Kean. From the time of Cooke's acknowledged supremacy in 'Richard the Third,' Kemble had given up the part: in now resuming it, he had only provoked unwilling and humiliating comparisons; and in selecting for his benefit and last performance the character of *Othello*, which had never ranked among his more finished efforts, he again placed himself at disadvantage with Kean, whose "fiery quality" in his splendid personation of the Moor was fresh in the memories of all. Like a diligent scholar, I took my place early, not to lose one look or word of this important lesson. *Iago*, *Babantio*, and *Roderigo* followed the traditional directions through the opening scene, and when it changed, the majestic figure of John Kemble in Moorish costume "with a slow and stately step" advanced from the side wing. A more august presence could scarcely be imagined. His darkened complexion detracted but little from the stern beauty of his commanding features, and the enfolding drapery of the Moorish mantle hung gracefully on his erect and noble form. The silent picture he presented compelled admiration. The spectators applauded loudly and heartily, but the slight bow with which he acknowledged the compliment spoke rather dissatisfaction at the occasional vacant spaces before him than recognition of the respectful feeling manifested by those present. I must

suppose he was out of humor, for to my exceeding regret, he literally walked through the play.

My attention was riveted upon him through the night in hope of some start of energy, some burst of passion, lighting up the dreary dulness of his cold recitation, but all was one gloomy unbroken level—actually not better than a school repetition. In the line “Not a jot! not a jot!” there was a tearful tremor upon his voice that had pathos in it: with that one exception not a single passage was uttered that excited the audience to sympathy, or that gave evidence of artistic power. His voice was monotonously husky, and every word was enunciated with labored distinctness. His readings were faultless; but there was no spark of feeling, that could enable us to get a glimpse of the “constant, loving, noble nature” of *Othello*, of him who,

Perplexed in the extreme,
Dropt tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their medicinal gum.

The play went through without one round of applause. There was not “the noble Moor, whom the full senate called all in all sufficient,” but John Kemble, apparently with stoical indifference, repeating the correct text of “the words that burn:” of that passion, of that sublime conception, there was no spark of feeling. The curtain fell in silence, and I left the theatre with the conviction that I had not yet seen Kemble, and that I must look forward to other opportunities to form a judgment of his powers. I heard afterwards that his health had suffered during his stay in Dublin, which

may in part account for his falling so much beneath himself.

W. C. MACREADY : 'Reminiscences,' *chap. 7*, 1816.

Kemble's last nights were now drawing to a close, but not answering the manager's expectation of their attraction, were given for benefits to those performers who chose to pay their extra price. He acted *Hotspur* for Young, *Macbeth* for Charles Kemble, the *Stranger* for Miss O'Neill, *Hamlet* for Miss Stephens, *Wolsey* for Farley, and *Penruddock* for Blanchard. I saw him in *Hotspur*, *Macbeth*, the *Stranger*, *Hamlet*, *Wolsey*, *Brutus*, *Octavian*, *King John*, *Lord Townly*, and *Coriolanus*. Of these I gave the preference to *King John*, *Wolsey*, the *Stranger*, *Brutus*, and his peerless *Coriolanus*. On his last performance of *Macbeth*, Mrs. Siddons was induced to reappear for her brother, Charles Kemble's benefit. The theatre was crowded. The musicians were ejected from the orchestra, which was filled with seats for spectators, among whom was Talma himself, then on a visit to England. As a very great favor Charles Kemble gave me a place in the third circle. Immense applause greeted the entrance of the Queen of Tragedy, the unrivalled Siddons, as *Lady Macbeth*. It was indeed Mrs. Siddons in person, but no longer the Mrs. Siddons on whose every look and accent enraptured crowds would hang breathless with delight and astonishment—who lent to dramatic poetry pathos and power beyond what the author himself could have conceived. Years had done their work, and those who had seen in her impersonations the highest "glories of her art" now felt regret that she should have been prevailed on to leave her

honored retirement, and force a comparison between the grandeur of the past and the feeble present. It was not a performance, but a mere repetition of the poet's text—no flash, no sign of her pristine all-subduing genius !

Through the whole first four acts the play moved heavily on : Kemble correct, tame, and effective ; but in the fifth, when the news was brought, "The queen, my lord, is dead," he seemed struck to the heart ; gradually collecting himself, he sighed out, "She should have died hereafter !" then, as if with the inspiration of despair, he hurried out, distinctly and pathetically, the lines :

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle !
Life's but a walking shadow ; a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more : it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.—

rising to a climax of desperation that brought down the enthusiastic cheers of the closely-packed theatre. All at once he seemed carried away by the genius of the scene. At the tidings of "the wood of Birnam moving," he staggered, as if the shock had struck the very seat of life, and in the bewilderment of fear and rage could just ejaculate the words "Liar and slave !" then lashing himself into a state of frantic rage, ended the scene in perfect triumph. His shrinking from *Macduff* when the charm on which his life hung was

broken by the declaration that his antagonist was "not of woman born" was a masterly stroke of art ; his subsequent defiance was most heroic ; and at his death Charles Kemble received him in his arms, and laid him gently on the ground, his physical powers being unequal to further effort.

On the sum of Kemble's merits judgments differed : that he was a great artist all allowed. His person was cast in the heroic mould, and, as may be seen in Lawrence's splendid portraits of him in *Coriolanus*, *Hamlet*, and *Rolla*, reached the most perfect ideal of manly beauty. But he had serious disadvantages to contend with in a very disagreeable voice, husky and untunable, and in a constitutional asthma that necessitated a prolonged and laborious indraught of his breath, and obliged him for the sake of distinctness to adopt an elaborate mode of utterance, enunciating every letter in every word. His limbs were not supple—indeed his stately bearing verged on stiffness ; and his style more suited to the majestic, the lofty, and the stern, than the pathetic, might not inaptly, in respect to his movement on the stage, be termed statuesque. Mrs. Siddons, speaking of him to Reynolds, the dramatist, said, "My brother John in his most impetuous bursts is always careful to avoid any discomposure of his dress or deportment ; but in the whirlwind of passion I lose all thought of such matters :" and this forgetfulness of self was one of the elements of her surpassing power. The admission of Mrs. Inchbald, one of Kemble's most ardent worshipers, corroborates the opinion very generally entertained of his phlegmatic temperament. In the part of *Oswyn*, in Congreve's tragedy of the 'Mourning Bride,' she says : 'Garrick

had great spirit and fire in every scene, but not the fire of love. Kemble has not even the sparks. Yet Kemble looks nobly, majestically, in *Oswyn*, and reminds the audience of the lines :—

‘ . . . tall pile,
Whose ancient pillars rear their marble heads,
* * * * *

Looking tranquillity.’ *

In all he did the study was apparent. The “ars celare artem,”† with all his great talent, he did not reach ; but he compelled the respect and admiration where he did not excite the sympathies of his audience. His noble form and stately bearing attracted and fixed observation, and his studious correctness retained attention ; but in the torrent and tempest of passion he had not the sustained power of Talma or Kean, but, like a Rembrandt picture, his performances were remarkable for most brilliant effects, worked out with wonderful skill on a sombre ground, which only a great master of his art could have achieved, and of which I have endeavored to convey some faint idea in my description of scenes of ‘Cato’ and ‘Macbeth.’ In his management he was a strict disciplinarian, following the traditional theatrical observances ; and the stage was greatly indebted to him for the reformation he effected in the barbarous costume (Romans with powdered heads and knee-breeches) that was in vogue until his day.

W. C. MACREADY: ‘Reminiscences,’ *chap.* 10.
1817.

* The ‘Mourning Bride,’ *act. ii. sc. 1.*

† “The art of concealing art.”

Mr. Kemble took his leave of the stage on Monday night in the character of *Coriolanus*. On his first coming forward to pronounce his farewell address he was received with a shout like thunder: on his retiring after it, the applause was long before it subsided entirely away. There is something in these partings with old public favorites exceedingly affecting. They teach us the shortness of human life, and the vanity of human pleasures. Our associations of admiration and delight with theatrical performers are among our earliest recollections—among our last regrets. They are links that connect the beginning and the end of life together; *their* bright and giddy career of popularity measures the arch that spans our brief existence. It is near twenty years since we first saw Mr. Kemble in the same character; yet how short the interval seems. The impression seems as distinct as if it were of yesterday. . . . We forget numberless things that have happened to ourselves, one generation of follies after another; but not the first time of our seeing Mr. Kemble, nor shall we easily forget the last, *Coriolanus*, the character in which he took his leave of the stage, was one of the first in which we remember to have seen him; and it was one in which we were not sorry to part with him, for we wished to see him appear like himself to the last. Nor was he wanting to himself on this occasion: he played the part as well as he ever did—with as much freshness and vigor. There was no abatement of spirit and energy—none of grace and dignity: his look, his action, his expression of the character, were the same as they ever were: they could not be finer.

Wm. HAZLITT: 'General View of the English Stage.'

Give Mr. Kemble only the *man* to play, why, he is nothing ; give him the paraphernalia of greatness and he is great. He “wears his heart in compliment exterrn.” He is the statue on the pedestal that cannot come down without danger of shaming its worshippers ; a figure that tells well with appropriate scenery and dresses, but not otherwise. Mr. Kemble contributes his own person to a tragedy, but only that. The poet must furnish all the rest and make the other parts equally dignified and graceful, or Mr. Kemble will not help him out. He will not lend dignity to the mean, spirit to the familiar ; he will not impart life and motion, passion and imagination, to all around him, for he has neither life nor motion, passion nor imagination in himself. He minds only the conduct of his own person, and leaves the piece to shift for itself.

Ibid.

John Kemble was often very amusing when he had had a good deal of wine. He and two friends were returning to town in an open carriage from the Priory (Lord Abercorn's), where they had dined ; and as they were waiting for change at a toll-gate, Kemble, to the amazement of the toll-keeper, called out in the tone of *Rolla*, “We seek no *change* ; and least of all such *change* as he would bring us !” When Kemble was living at Lausanne, he used to feel rather jealous of Mont Blanc ; he disliked to hear people always asking, “How does Mont Blanc look this morning ?”

‘Recollections of the Table Talk of Samuel Rogers.’

JOSEPH SHEPHERD MUNDEN.

1758—1832.

But see, what comic mortal sidling in,
Collects his face to an establish'd grin ;
And stands so like a fool, and speaks so dry,
And looks so soft, and yet so cursed sly—
With bended knees, small voice, and mincing toes,
A superannuated ape he goes,
Twisting his jaw now one way, now the other ;
His right eye peering over at its brother ?
"Tis Munden—"Munden?" "Tis, Sir, on my word.
"Nay, I know Munden—din'd with him the third."
True, but he grins with such successful rage,
His friends can't recognize him on the stage ;
On all alike he glitters like the sun,
The same his pains in pathos or in pun,
Grief, pity, joy—all end in mere grimace,
And prostitute expression walks his face,
Like Roman Anthony, from empire hurl'd
He for a face consents to lose a world.

The 'Thespiad,' 1809.



JOSEPH SHEPHERD MUNDEN
As Sir Francis Gripe in "The Busy Body."

JOSEPH SHEPHERD MUNDEN.

That Munden was worthy of a niche in the Temple of Thespis, all contemporary records would prove ; even if the affectionate hands of Elia had not carved the familiar figure by which, in our days, that niche is filled. The man whom Charles Lamb loved, must have been a lovable man ; and to Charles Lamb's artistic image, little need be added here, but the simple biographical pedestal upon which it shall stand.

Munden, like Horne Tooke, might have claimed descent from a Turkey merchant, for he was born, early in the year 1758, over the shop of his father, a poulterer in Brooke Market, Holborn. Left when a mere lad to the care of a widowed mother, he found employment with a neighboring chemist at the age of twelve. After a short experience he threw physic to the dogs and took to the law, but from an attorney's office he descended to a law stationer's shop, and for some years was a mere copyist of law papers. His intense admiration for the acting of Garrick carried him almost nightly to the theatre, and becoming fascinated with the life, he determined to go upon the stage, making his first appearance with a company of strolling players in a barn at Leatherhead, in Surrey.

During his early provincial experiences he met with

the usual hardships attendant upon that life, receiving more kicks than salary, and more stones than bread. He even went back to his office for a year or two, but the passion for the stage was too strong for him, and could not be resisted. In 1780 he was acting at Canterbury; he spent two seasons at Manchester, and on Dec. 2, 1790, he made his formal bow to a London audience, at Covent Garden, as *Sir Francis Gripe* in the ‘Busy Body,’ and *Jemmy Jumps*, in the comic opera of the ‘Farmer.’ His success was complete and immediate, although “Anthony Pasquin,” comparing him with Quick, his living rival, and John Edwin, the burletta singer who had just died, made him the subject of an epigram in which he declared him

Neither the Quick nor the dead !

On the production of the ‘Road to Ruin’—originally called the ‘City Prodigals,’ but presented for the first time at Covent Garden under the now familiar name, Feb. 18, 1791,—Munden greatly strengthened the good impression he had made in other parts by his performance of *Old Dornton*. In the beginning he was assigned the character of *Silky*, afterwards played by Quick, and he accepted *Old Dornton* with disgust and regret. He soon discovered its possibilities however, and made of it the great and lasting triumph of his life. Holcroft, who had remonstrated against giving it to a comparatively untried actor, is said to have been astonished at the effect of his own composition. The Road to ‘Ruin’ was repeated thirty-eight times during that season, and was twice “commanded” by his Majesty George III.

Munden first appeared as *Polonius*, Dec. 27, 1792, giving a dignity and a venerable demeanor to the

part which had up to that time been acted as a buffoon. It is said to have been one of his most finished performances, and in later years it won from Byron the remark that *Polonius* would die with Munden, as *Lady Macbeth* died with Mrs. Siddons.

During the season of 1797-8 Munden was at the Haymarket, where on July 17, 1797, the 'Heir at Law' was first produced with Munden as *Zekiel Homespun*. He was the original *Sir Robert Bramble* in the 'Poor Gentleman,'—at Covent Garden, Feb., 1812—*Ephraim Smooth* in 'Wild Oats,' *Caustic* in the 'Way to Get Married,' *Old Rapid* in 'A Cure for the Heartache,' *Crack* in the 'Turnpike Gate,' *Sir Abel Handy* in 'Speed the Plough,' and in many now half-forgotten parts. He was at Covent Garden from 1798 to 1812, and at Drury Lane from 1813 to 1824; playing during the summer months a round of engagements in the provincial cities of the sister island.

On May 31, 1824, he took his formal farewell of the stage at Drury Lane, as *Old Dozey* in 'Past Ten O'clock, and a Rainy Night,' and as *Sir Robert Bramble*. The occasion was considered very important, and the house was crowded to excess with the theatre-going world of the metropolis. Charles and Mary Lamb had places, of Munden's own providing, in a corner of the orchestra, very close to the stage; and Sargeant Talford, in a few lines draws a picture of a scene not down in the bills, delightfully characteristic both of Lamb and of Munden, over which the friends of Elia in our generation will love to linger. From his position in one of the topmost boxes, Talford caught a glimpse of Lamb's head, directly beneath the line of the footlights, buried in a glistening

and enormous porter pot ; while the broad face and form of Munden, sympathetic and smiling, made up for the farce, could be seen at the little door through which the musicians enter the orchestra, waiting to receive and to hide from the common gaze, the quart measure as soon as its bottom was reached. And so, entirely unknown to the public, the old actor stepped from the public gaze forever, almost in the very act of paying to the man who has immortalized him, the most touching and consoling tribute the gentle critic could have received ; and in a manner that even Carlyle himself would hardly have condemned.

Munden survived this farewell for eight years ; and dying on the 6th day February, 1832, he was buried, a few days later, in the vaults of the Church of St. George, Bloomsbury, under the most serio-comic steeple in all England.

LAURENCE HUTTON.

Not many nights ago I had come home from seeing this extraordinary performer in *Cockletop* [in O'Keefe's 'Modern Antiques'], and when I retired to my pillow his whimsical image still stuck by me in a manner as to threaten sleep. In vain I tried to divest myself of it by conjuring up the most opposite associations. I resolved to be serious. I raised up the gravest topics of life, private misery, public calamity. All would not do :

— There the antic sate
Mocking our state —

his queer visnomy, his bewildering costume, all the strange things which he had raked together, his ser-

pentine rod swagging about in his pocket, Cleopatra's tear, and the rest of his relics, O'Keefe's wild farce, and *his* wilder commentary, till the passion of laughter, like grief in excess, relieved itself by its own weight, inviting the sleep which in the first instance it had driven away.

But I was not to escape so easily. No sooner did I fall into slumbers, than the same image, only more perplexing, assailed me in the shape of dreams. Not one Munden, but five hundred, were dancing before me, like the faces which, whether you will or no, come when you have been taking opium—all the strange combinations which this strangest of all strange mortals ever shot his proper countenance into, from the day he came commissioned to dry up the tears of the town for the loss of the now almost forgotten Edwin. O for the power of the pencil to have fixed them when I awoke ! A season or two since there was exhibited a Hogarth gallery. I do not see why there should not be a Munden gallery. In richness and variety, the latter would not fall far short of the former.

There is one face of Farley, one face of Knight, one (but what a one it is !) of Liston ; but Munden has none that you can properly pin down and call *his*. When you think he has exhausted his battery of looks, in unaccountable warfare with your gravity, suddenly he sprouts out an entirely new set of features, like Hydra. He is not one, but legion ; not so much a comedian as a company. If his name could be multiplied like his countenance, it might fill a playbill. He, and he alone, literally *makes faces* ; applied to any other person, the phrase is a mere figure, denoting certain modifications of the human countenance. Out of

some invisible wardrobe he dips for faces, as his friend Suett used for wigs, and fetches them out as easily. I should not be surprised to see him some day put out the head of a river-horse, or come forth a pewitt or lapwing, some feathered metamorphosis.

I have seen this gifted actor in *Sir Christopher Curry*, in *Old Dornton*, diffuse a glow of sentiment which has made the pulse of a crowded theatre beat like that of one man, when he has come in aid of the pulpit, doing good to the moral heart of a people. I have seen some faint approaches to this sort of excellence in other players. But in the grand grotesque of farce, Munden stands out as single and unaccompanied as Hogarth. Hogarth, strange to tell, had no followers. The school of Munden began and must end with himself.

CHARLES LAMB: the 'Essays of Elia,' on the Acting of Munden.

The regular playgoers ought to put on mourning, for the king of broad comedy is dead to the drama ! Alas ! Munden is no more !—give sorrow vent. He may yet walk the town, pace the pavement in a seeming existence—eat, drink, and nod to his friends in all the affectation of life—but Munden, *the* Munden !—Munden, with the bunch of countenances, the bouquet of faces, is gone for ever from the lamps, and, as far as comedy is concerned, is as dead as Garrick ! When an actor retires (we will put the *suicide* as mildly as possible), how many worthy persons perish with him ! With Munden, *Sir Peter Teazle* must experience a shock—*Sir Robert Bramble* gives up the ghost—*Crack* ceases to breathe. Without Munden what becomes of

Dozey? Where shall we seek *Jemmy Jumps?* *Nipperkin* and a thousand of such admirable fooleries fall to nothing, and the departure, therefore, of such an actor as Munden is a dramatic calamity. On the night that this inestimable humorist took farewell of the public, he also took his benefit—a benefit in which the public assuredly did not participate. The play was Coleman's 'Poor Gentleman,' with Tom Dibdin's farce of 'Past Ten o'Clock.' Reader, we all know Munden in *Sir Robert Bramble*, and old tobacco-complexioned *Dozey*;—we all have seen the old hearty baronet in his light sky-blue coat and genteel cocked hat, and we have all seen the weather-beaten old pensioner, dear old *Dozey*, tacking about the stage in that intense blue sea livery, drunk as heart could wish, and right valorous in memory. On this night Munden seemed, like the Gladiator, "to rally life's whole energies to die," and as we were present at this great display of his powers, and as this will be the last opportunity that will ever be afforded us to speak of this admirable performer, we shall "consecrate" as old John Buncle says, "a paragraph to him."

The time, however, came for the fall of the curtain, and for the fall of Munden! The farce of the night was finished. The farce of the long forty years' play was over! He stepped forward, not as *Dozey*, but as Munden, and we heard him address us from the stage for the last time. He trusted, unwisely we think, to a written paper. He *read* of "heart-felt recollections" and "indelible impressions." He stammered and he pressed his heart, and put on his spectacles, and blundered his written gratitudes, and wiped his eyes, and bowed and stood, and at last staggered away for ever!

The plan of his farewell was bad, but the long life of excellence which really made his farewell pathetic overcame all defects, and the people and Joe Munden parted like lovers ! Well ! Farewell to the Rich Old Heart ! May thy retirement be as full of repose as thy public life was full of excellence ! We must all have our farewell benefits in our turn.

CHARLES LAMB : the ‘Essays of Elia,’ Munden’s Farewell.

Your communication to me of the death of Munden made me weep. Now, sir, I am not of the melting mood ; but, in these serious times, the loss of half the world’s fun is no trivial deprivation. It was my loss (or *gain* shall I call it ?), in the early time of my play-going, to have missed all Munden’s acting. There was only he and Lewis at Covent Garden, while Drury Lane was exuberant with Parsons, Dodd, etc., such a comic company as, I suppose, the stage never showed. Thence, in the evening of my life, I had Munden all to myself, more mellowed, richer, perhaps, than ever. I cannot say what his change of faces produced in me. It was not acting. He was not one of my “old actors.” It might be better. His power was extravagant. I saw him one evening in three drunken characters. Three farces were played. One part was *Dozey*—I forget the rest—but they were so discriminated that a stranger might have seen them all, and not have dreamed that he was seeing the same actor. I am jealous for the actors who pleased my youth. He was not a Parsons or a Dodd, but he was more wonderful. He seemed as if he could *do* anything. He was not an actor, but something *better*, if you please. Shall I

instance *Old Foresight* in ‘Love for Love,’ in which Parsons was at once the old man, the astrologer, etc. Munden dropped the old man, the doater—which makes the character—but he substituted for it a moon-struck character, a perfect abstraction from this earth, that looked as if he had newly come down from the planets. Now, *that* is not what I call *acting*. It might be better. He was imaginative; he could impress upon an audience an *idea*—the low one perhaps—of a leg of mutton and turnips; but such was the grandeur and singleness of his expressions, that that single expression would convey to all his auditory a notion of all the pleasures they had all received from all the legs of mutton and turnips they had ever eaten in their lives. Now, this is not *acting*, nor do I set down Munden amongst my old actors. He was only a wonderful man, exerting his vivid impressions through the agency of the stage. In one only thing did I see him *act*, that is, support a character: it was in a wretched farce called ‘Johnny Gilpin,’ for Dowton’s benefit, in which he did a Cockney. The thing ran but one night; but when I say that Lubin’s ‘Log’ was nothing to it, I say little; it was transcendent. And here let me say of actors—*envious* actors—that of Munden Liston was used to speak almost with the enthusiasm due to the dead, in terms of such allowed superiority to every actor on the stage, and this at a time when Munden was gone by in the world’s estimation, that it convinced me that *artists* (in which term I include poets, painters, etc.) are not so envious as the world think.

CHARLES LAMB: the ‘Essays of Elia,’ The Death of Munden.

When the inimitable comic actor, Munden, took his farewell of the stage, Mary Lamb and her brother failed not to attend the last appearance of their favorite, and it was upon this occasion that Mary made that admirable pun, which has sometimes been attributed to Charles—"Sic transit gloria *Munden*." The very look, the very gesture, the whole bearing of Munden first in the pathetic character of the gentleman-father, next in the farce-character of the village cobbler, remain impressed upon the brain of her who witnessed them as if beheld but yesterday. The tipsy lunge with which he rolled up to the table whereon stood that tempting brown jug, the leer of mingled slyness and attempted unconcernedness with which he slid out his furtive thought to the audience—"Some gentleman has left his ale!" then with an unctuous smack of his lips, jovial and anticipating, adding, "And some other gentleman will drink it"—all stand present to fancy vivid and unforgotten.

CHARLES AND MARY COWDEN CLARKE: 'Recollections of Writers,' *s. v.* Mary Lamb.

I have seen him while playing the part of a vagabond loiterer about inn doors, look at, and gradually approach a pot of ale on a table from a distance for ten minutes together, while he kept the house in roars of laughter by the intense idea which he humbly conveyed of its contents, and the no less intense manifestation of his cautious but inflexible resolution to drink it. So in acting the part of a credulous old antiquary on whom an old beaver is palmed for "the hat of William Tell," he reverently put the hat on his head, and then solemnly walked to and fro, with such

an excessive sense of the glory with which he was crowned, such a weight of reflected heroism, and accumulation of Tell's whole history in that single representative culminating point, elegantly halting every now and then to put himself in the attitude of one drawing a bow, that the spectators could hardly have been astonished had they seen his hair stand on end, and carry the hat off with it.

LEIGH HUNT: '*Autobiography*,' vol. i., chap. 6.

. . . . Mr. Munden is one of the strongest supports to our gigantic farces, and his powers, like his features, have been so twisted out of their proper direction that they seem unable to recover themselves. Almost the whole force of his acting consists in two or three ludicrous gestures and an innumerable variety of as fanciful contortions of countenance as ever threw women into hysterics : his features are like the reflection of a man's face in a ruffled stream, they undergo a perpetual undulation of grin : every emotion is attended by a grimace, which he by no means wishes to be considered as unstudied, for if it has not immediately its effect upon the spectators, he improves or continues it till it has ; and I have seen his interlocutor disconcerted, and the performance stopped, by the unseasonable laughter of the audience, who were conquered into the notice of a posthumous joke by this ambitious pertinacity of muscle.

LEIGH HUNT: '*Critical Essays*,' London, 1807,
pp. 81-2.

Joseph S. Munden is said to have first distinguished himself at Canterbury—he was well received at Covent

Garden, and in process of time became the first comic actor of his day—he had the peculiar merit of playing serious old men as well as comic ones—his *Capt. Bertram* was nearly as good as his *Sir Francis Gripe*. He sometimes went a little beyond nature, but it was impossible not to laugh at him; his countenance was very expressive—he indulged himself in grimace, but his grimace usually added force to what he had to say. Some person observed of him, that when he appeared to have exhausted all his humor, he had still a stroke or two in store.

P. GENEST: ‘History of the Stage,’ vol. ix., Drury Lane, 1823–24.

Northcote said, “Munden was excellent but an artificial actor.”

Wm. HAZLITT: ‘Conversations of Northcote,’ xv.

His eyes were here, there and everywhere: his mouth of all sorts of dimensions. I really think he could turn his nose up or down, or place his eyebrows on his cheeks, or at the top of his forehead. Besides not depending upon outline, he could make copious use of colors, and give his whole countenance the most grotesque appearance. Grimaldi had scarcely less make-up of face than Munden had. I have seen him, on his first appearance for the night stand by the footlights and distort his countenance as if every separate feature was a Proteus, the generality of the house all the while convulsed with laughter. . . . Munden was a rich old-fashioned comedian, playing sterling characters well, and sometimes giving importance to trifles. There was a character yclept *Cockletop*,

in the little piece of the ‘Turnpike Gate,’ in which he used to draw forth continued bursts of laughter ; and yet if you could read it, you would wonder how anybody could laugh at all at it.

WM. ROBSON : The ‘Old Playgoer,’ Letter 6.

The great poet and novelist [Sir Walter Scott] entertained Munden with his accustomed hospitality. For some time he conversed upon indifferent subjects ; but at length, referring to the stage he said, “ Mr. Munden, there was one performance of yours which astonished me more than most I have witnessed.” “Indeed,” replied his guest, who expected one of those compliments which are paid, as a matter of course, to public men ; “pray what was that, Mr. Scott ?” Munden expected to be complimented upon the part of *Old Dornton*, *Sir Robert Bramble*, or *Sir Peter Teazle*, upon which the town had showered down its applause ; he was mistaken. “I cannot recollect the name of it,” said Scott : “it was a piece of flimsy material, and the part was nothing in itself—I think an old general who was blind ; and what struck me was, how you could produce such an effect debarred the use of the most powerful feature which the art demands.” Mr. Munden felt the critical acumen that dictated this remark, and always related the circumstance with pride and pleasure.

‘ Memoirs of Munden,’ by his Son, *chap. vii.*, p. 220.

Charles Lamb, Elliston, and Munden, had driven over from Leamington to Warwick Castle, in one of the public carriages, for the purpose of seeing the wonders of Cæsar’s Tower and the memorable relics

of Earl "Guy." The party having gone through the customary discipline imposed by the old castle house-keeper, and having listened to the marvels of the giant earl, to the very echo of the stricken porridge-pot, were now returning to a late refection at Leamington, when, just as the shandry-dan was entering the village,

"Stay ! stay ! my dear boys," cries Munden ; "I'll just step out here. Here lives my dear old friend, Mistress Winifred Watson ; so I'll look in on the old lady. In her eighty-sixth year—her eighty-sixth year, Mr. Lamb."

On the driver pulling up, out tripped Munden, as nimbly as gout would permit him, and bidding his friends an abrupt "Good-day," was presently across the road, when Elliston burst into an immoderate fit of laughter.

"Why, what is this ?" demanded Lamb.

"Oh ! you don't know him, my good sir," responded the other. "Much as you admire our incomparable Munden, you don't yet know him. Why, he has no acquaintance here."

"What ? no Mistress Winifred Watson ?"

"No—no—no !"

"No dear old lady in her eighty-sixth year ?"

"A perfect myth," responded Elliston. "Heark'ye, in five minutes we shall have to settle for the hire of this jaunting-car and horses, and Joe Munden always keeps the stage waiting on such occasions."

GEORGE RAYMOND : 'Life of Elliston,' *period iii., chap. I.*

Munden never saw me in the street that he did not

get astride his great cotton umbrella and ride up to me like a boy on a stick.

J. R. PLANCHÉ : 'Recollections and Reflections,'
vol. ii., chap. 3.

Munden had an unpleasant way of discouraging, if not of extinguishing, the flame of ambition in the youthful dramatic author's breast. During a green-room reading of a comedy he would sit making hideous faces, and when the three or five acts were concluded, plaintively remark, "My precious eyes, sir, but where's the comedy ?"

Cherry once formed the scheme of taking a company to Calcutta. The terms talked of were in keeping with the land of silver fountains and golden sands. A lac of rupees was offered to the "walking gentleman." "What is a lac of rupees ?" asked the actor to whom Cherry made the proposal. "Do you know what a lack of money is ?" asked Munden. "Yes." "Well, a lac of rupees means exactly the same thing."

Munden had a foolish way of boasting of his ignorance. "I never read any book but a play," said this son of a poultorer ; "no play but one in which I myself acted, and no portion of that play but my own scenes." When this was told to Charles Lamb, he said, "I knew Munden well, and *I believe him.*"

W. CLARK RUSSELL : 'Representative Actors,'
pp. 257-8, foot note.

He was in my opinion the best comedian I ever saw. He identified himself with a character, and never lost sight of it—his pathos went to the heart at once, and his humor was irresistible. In his

latter years he was accused of sacrificing too much for the sake of gaining applause ; but I believe he endeavored to alter his pure and natural style to suit the declining taste of his auditors, and compete with the caricaturists by whom he was surrounded. In playing *Ralph* to his *Old Brumagem* at Drury Lane I objected to some business he pointed out, as being unnatural. “Unnatural !” said he with a sneer ; “that has been my mistake for years. Nature be d—— ; make the people laugh.”

But he is gone ! and if there is any fun in the next world he’s in the midst of it.

Sic transit gloria Munden:

JOSEPH COWELL : ‘Thirty Years Among the Players,’ *part i.*, *chap. 8.*

Sir Robert Bramble, in the ‘Poor Gentleman,’ and *Dozy*, in ‘Past Ten o’Clock,’ were the parts which this celebrated actor selected for his farewell benefit ; and it was announced that, in the course of the evening, “*Mr. Munden would attempt to take leave of his friends and the public.*” The audience was exceeding numerous, and manifested, throughout, their warm sentiments of regard for one of the most highly-gifted comedians that ever trod the stage.

Munden played on this interesting night with his wonted feeling and energy, but the excitement of the occasion, and a little fermented indulgence, completely overcame him, before he was *functus officio* with the audience. At the conclusion of the play, he approached the lamps for the purpose of delivering an address—a poetical “*vale,*” written expressly by Mr.

Talfourd. Poor Munden faltered very early, both in metre and matter ; when, deliberately pulling out his spectacles, he commenced reading a production, the spirit of which was the spontaneous outpourings of gratitude and affection. This little *maladroit* proceeding somewhat perplexed the sentiment of the night ; but as the “veteran comedian” made his final bow, there was not a single person of taste or intelligence present, who did not feel the stage had that night lost one of the most brilliant comedians that had ever adorned it.

GEORGE RAYMOND : ‘Life of Elliston,’ *Period iii., chap. I.*

ELIZABETH FARREN.

1759—1829.

Her form is celestial : she looks, Friend, between us,
A fourth lovely Grace, or the sister of Venus ;
The mistress of Spring, or the handmaid of Flora,
To cheer human-kind, like the rays of Aurora.
A simper bewitching irradiates each feature,
And the men all exclaim—What an angelic creature !
Such ease, such politeness, such wit unaffected,
A love-beaming eye, and that eye—well directed.

JOHN WILLIAMS (“Anthony Pasquin”): the ‘Children of Thespis,’ (*Ed.* 1792).



ELIZABETH FARREN.

ELIZABETH FARREN.

Edward, twelfth Earl of Derby, says Burke, married, on May 1, 1797, Eliza* Farren, daughter of Mr. George Farren, of Cork.

Mr. George Farren, of Cork, is variously described, according to the friendliness of the describer, as a surgeon, or as an apothecary's apprentice, who gave up his medical employment for the calling of an actor; and appears to have been a man of dissipated habits, most of whose theatrical career was spent in miserable strolling companies. He married a lady about whose antecedents stage-historians are by no means unanimous. There is a balance of opinion in favor of the theory that she was a haberdasher in Tewkesbury; but some hold that she was the daughter of, and assistant to, an ale-house keeper in Liverpool; which theory is dignified by a third party into that which makes her the daughter "of Mr. Wright, an eminent brewer at Liverpool." But, whatever her parentage may have been, she was an excellent mother; and, after her husband's death, which happened when her children were very young, she succeeded in bringing them up with credit and respectability. Elizabeth

* Why the later editions of Burke should give Miss Farren's Christian name as Eliza, I do not know. Her contemporaries call her Elizabeth, or (if they are scornfully inclined) Betsy.

was her second child, and was born in 1759. Whether the future Countess of Derby herself experienced all the wretchedness of strolling is a point which has given rise to much discussion. Some of her pamphleteering biographers assert vigorously that she did, and one of them, who assumed the name of "Petronius Arbiter," tells how her ladyship usually carried the drum, which was the primitive advertising medium relied on by the company. In a "Biographical Sketch" published in contradiction (and abuse) of "Petronius Arbiter," it is emphatically denied that she ever was a stroller, although "a malignant scribbler, copying from an incorrect compilation," says so. (This incorrect compilation I take to be the 'Secret History of the Green Rooms.') But, though this laudatory biographer expressly states that "Miss Farren neither made her *début* in a strolling party, nor associated with one afterwards," it is certain that she belonged to the company of the noted stroller, Jemmy Whiteley ; for Tate Wilkinson gives a bill of this company's performance at Wakefield, in which Miss Farren was announced to play *Columbine* in the pantomime of 'Old Mother Red Cap,' and to sing between the acts of 'King Henry II.' He gives 1774 as the year of this performance, but, as it seems very unlikely that an actress should have returned to play such parts in a strolling company after succeeding in a regular theatre, it may be safely assumed that Wilkinson, whose dates are generally doubtful, was in this instance a year or two out in his reckoning.

Whiteley is said to have recommended Miss Farren to Joseph Younger, then patentee of the Liverpool theatre, who gave her an engagement, and showed her

great kindness. One of the stock accusations against Miss Farren in later years was that she had treated Younger with shameful ingratitude: but this was never proved. Her first appearance in a regular theatre (if we reject a very hypothetical account of her playing at Bath when twelve years of age) was made at Liverpool in 1773, as *Rosetta*, in the opera of 'Love in a Village,' in which she was very successful. She shortly afterwards played *Lady Townly*, in the 'Provoked Husband ;' and, though this is a most extraordinary part for a girl of fifteen to play satisfactorily, she made a great hit in it. In 1777 Younger got an engagement for her at the Haymarket, under George Colman the elder. She made her first appearance in London, on June 9, 1777, in the character of *Miss Hardcastle*, in 'She Stoops to Conquer,' in which she created a very favorable impression. Her first original part was *Rosara*, in Colman's 'Spanish Barber ;' and, in her second season, she played *Lady Townly*, which, as in Liverpool, created a very decided sensation. She became a great favorite with the public, and remained with Colman at the summer theatre for two seasons. In 1778-9, which was the season of the coalition between the patentees of Drury Lane and Covent Garden, she appeared at both houses; but it is not quite clear to which she was at first engaged: for, although she continued ever after at the former, she certainly appeared at Covent Garden first—the dates being: at Covent Garden, Sept. 23, 1778, as *Clarinda*, in the 'Suspicious Husband :' at Drury Lane, Oct. 8, 1778, as *Charlotte Rusport*, in the 'West Indian.' Up to the end of the season 1781-2 Miss Farren played leading parts in tragedy, and second to

Mrs. Abington in comedy. During this period she was much admired by the Gilded Youth who frequented the greenroom, and is said to have inspired a serious passion in Charles James Fox. This is not denied by any of her biographers, who only differ as to whether or not her speedy advancement in her profession was in any way the result of Fox's admiration and support of her. It is said that Miss Farren would listen to no proposals which were not matrimonial, and that Fox would probably have made her an honorable offer of his hand, had she not unluckily appeared in a "breeches" part, which, revealing her scanty of figure, was effectual in cooling the ardor of the Man of the People. It is unfortunate for the trustworthiness of this anecdote that the part in question, *Nancy Lovel*, in Colman's 'Suicide,' was one of those which she played at the Haymarket, before her engagement at the Winter Theatres.

Before the beginning of 1782-3 Mrs. Abington seceded from Drury Lane to Covent Garden, and Miss Farren stepped into her place, which enabled her to give up her tragedy parts, and confine her attention to comedy, in which she was accepted as a very efficient substitute for even so great an actress as her predecessor. From this time until her retirement in 1797 her artistic career was uneventful. She made steady progress in her profession and in public favor, and had vouchsafed to her, in addition, the crowning joy of the actress's life, the entry into polite society. She was caressed by countesses, and had earls, viscounts, and honorables among her train of admirers. She took a house at the West End, kept a carriage, and played the part of the lady of fashion with perfect success.

When the Duke of Richmond gave magnificent private theatricals at his house in Privy Gardens, Miss Farren undertook the stage management. This enabled her to extend her acquaintance among the aristocracy, for whom she had the average Briton's reverence in an intensified degree. Regarding this reverence, "Anthony Pasquin" says :

Tho' her fine set of teeth partial courtesy brings,
From ridiculous Earls, and illustrious Things :
As she nods from the stage to her STANLEYS and FOXES,
To let the house see she is known in the boxes.

And a critic in the *Monthly Mirror* reprobates her practice of "playing to a *single box* rather than to the audience," remarking that "the nod of recognition and the simper of friendship are no desirable accompaniments to a dramatic representation." But it is much to her credit that, even when she occupied the position of Countess-Elect, she never failed in her duty to the public. Almost the only disagreeable incident in her career was a trifling unpleasantness caused by her non-appearance on Nov. 29, 1796, the night advertised for the production of Holcroft's 'Force of Ridicule.' On that evening, at the time for raising the curtain, Miss Farren had not arrived at the theatre; and, after some delay, it was announced that she was too ill to leave her room. The comedy was therefore postponed for a week. This incident caused much comment in the public prints, and Miss Farren found it advisable to publish a letter assuring the public that she had really been ill. On the production of the postponed play, Dec. 6, 1796, the audience showed some displeasure, and Wroughton had to make a formal apology for the actress's offence. Scandal gave

as the real cause of indisposition a quarrel with Miss Decamp about a satin gown, but Boaden declares positively that, Miss Farren's salary being very much in arrear, she adopted this means of making Sheridan discharge his debt. The expedient seems to have failed, however ; for is it not recorded that, after her marriage, the noble Earl, her husband, applied to Sheridan for the arrears of his Countess's salary, and declined to leave the room till these were paid ?

At what time Miss Farren attracted the serious attentions of Lord Derby is not quite certain, but it must have been shortly after her appearance at Drury Lane. His Lordship's adoration, and the lady's impregnable virtue, — we are told with becoming awe that “it is an undisputed fact that she never admitted his Lordship to any interview, unless Mrs. Farren was present,” — led to an almost formal engagement ; and the loving couple only awaited the removal of a trifling obstacle which barred their union. This trifling obstacle, which was not removed for many years, was the noble Earl's wife, who lived till March 14, 1797. Then no time was lost : Miss Farren's last appearance was hurried on, and took place on April 8, when she played *Lady Teazle* ; and on May 1, some six weeks after his first wife's death, Lord Derby married Elizabeth Farren. The relation in which his Lordship stood to his wife might make a long period of mourning for her unnecessary, but it is difficult to find any adequate excuse for such haste. Like a character in a sentimental novel, Miss Farren loses all interest for us when she marries, and it only remains to be chronicled that she died on April 23, 1829, having had three children, of whom two died young, and

the third married the Earl of Wilton. The present Derby family is descended from Miss Farren's predecessor.

Miss Farren was of more than average height, but so thin that art had to be largely employed in the composition of her figure ; as "Anthony Pasquin" puts it, with somewhat brutal frankness :

She is manteau'd fallacious before and behind.

But her bearing was dignified and graceful, beyond that of any other actress of her time. Her eyes were blue and full of expression, and her face was handsome and mobile : indeed it was objected that, in comedy, she was "too free in the management of her countenance," which is, I suppose, a delicate way of saying that she had a tendency to grimace. She had not a voice of much power or even sweetness, but its quality was pleasant and refined ; and she had the great merit of being a remarkably clear, as well as correct, speaker. Boaden says that, conscious of the weakness of her voice, she had a habit of standing well forward on the stage.

In her acting, Miss Farren stands pre-eminent as representative of Fine Ladies. It is a question if even Mrs. Oldfield was her superior, and, with this exception, no actress, either before or since, can be compared with her. Grace and elegance were her natural characteristics ; her understanding was good, and she had a perfect appreciation of humor ; she was vivacious, but her vivacity was tempered by unfailing good taste. Tate Wilkinson says of her, in his '*Wandering Patentee*' (*vol. ii. p. 30*) : "I cannot recall to my mind's eye, such fashion, ease, pleas-

antry, and elegance, in the captivating coquette and the lady of fashion all conjoined, as when I view the alluring, the entertaining, the all-accomplished Miss Farren": and Boaden goes so far as to declare that her retirement absolutely produced the degeneracy of comedy into farce. In his Memoirs (*vol. i., p. 122*), Wilkinson institutes a comparison between Peg Woffington and Miss Farren, which is sufficiently curious to be quoted :—

SCALE OF MERIT.

Their complexions and features much alike.—Miss Farren will be more like ten years hence ; before which time I hope she will be distinguished by some other appellation.

MRS. WOFFINGTON.

MISS FARREN.

Mrs. Woffington was tall.....	So is Miss Farren.
Mrs. Woffington was beautiful.....	So is Miss Farren.
Mrs. Woffington was elegant.....	So is Miss Farren.
Wrs. Woffington was well bred.....	So is Miss Farren.
Mrs. Woffington had wit.....	So has Miss Farren.
Mrs. Woffington had a harsh, broken, and discordant voice.	Miss Farren's musical and bewitching.
Mrs. Woffington could be rude and vulgar....	Miss Farren never.

Although Miss Farren, in the early part of her career, played many parts in tragedy, she never had sufficient physical power to become a great tragic actress ; but her training in this department of the drama stood her in good stead in sentimental characters, and in occasional pathetic passages in comedy. Thus, her *Indiana*, in Steele's 'Conscious Lovers,' and her *Cecilia*, in Miss Lee's 'Chapter of Accidents,' were unequalled ; and she was most affecting in the scene of *Lady Townly's* repentance, and in *Julia's* reproach of *Falkland*, in the 'Rivals.'

Among her best characters were—*Belinda* ('Old



ELIZABETH FARREN
As Olivia.

Bachelor') ; *Millamant* ('Way of the World') ; *Lady Townly* ('Provoked Husband') ; *Lady Betty Modish* ('Careless Husband') ; and, generally, all the Fine Ladies of Congreve, Farquhar, and Cibber : *Clarinda* ('Suspicious Husband') ; *Lady Teazle*, in which she succeeded Mrs. Abington ; *Lady Paragon* ('Natural Son') ; *Emmeline* ('King Arthur') ; *Indiana* ; *Cecilia* ; *Lady Emily Gayville* ('Heiress') ; *Emily Tempest* ('Wheel of Fortune') ; *Julia* ('Rivals'). Her Shaksperean parts were—*Olivia*, *Portia*, *Juliet*, *Mrs. Ford*, *Helena* in 'All's Well that Ends Well,' *Beatrice*, *Dorinda* in Kemble's mutilation of the 'Tempest,' and *Hermione*. That she was excellent in *Dorinda* we know, and there is no doubt that she was also very successful in, at any rate, *Portia* and *Beatrice*.

There is no formal memoir of Miss Farren. The 'Memoirs of the present Countess of Derby, by Petronius Arbiter, Esq.,' formerly alluded to, is an impudent production, written in an ill-natured style, and with a few grossnesses thrown in with obviously offensive intention—which grossnesses then helped to send the book through at least seven editions, and now make it "curious," and consequently valuable. But, though scandalous, I have no hesitation in saying that it is practically correct in its main facts, and that the memoirs published in contradiction of it were infinitely less accurate. These opposition productions bore the formidable titles of the 'Testimony of Truth to Exalted Merit: or, a biographical sketch of the Right Honorable the Countess of Derby; in refutation of a False and Scandalous Libel:' and the 'Memoirs of the present Countess of Derby, rescued by Truth from the Assassinating Pen of Petronius

Arbiter ; and proving the Stage, from the patronage of the most Exalted Personages, to have been always considered as a School for Morality, by Scriptor Veritatis.' A pamphlet entitled, 'Thalia to Eliza : a Poetical Epistle from the Comic Muse to the Countess of D—,' is unfriendly in tone, and is described by the *Monthly Mirror* as "a jumble of malignity and falsehood."

ROBERT W. LOWE.

Miss Farren, then in her *teens*, made her *début* [1777] as *Miss Hardcastle*, in Goldsmith's comedy of 'She Stoops to Conquer,'—as appears by Mr. Winston's note. She conquered so much subsequently in the superior walk of comedy that she might have stooped in resuming this character, although it is worthy the acceptance of an actress of great ability : —she came most opportunely to prevent a chasm which would have been greatly lamented ; and to personate modern females of fashion when the retirement of the Abington, with the *vieille cour*, was approaching. To dilate upon the history of the lovely and accomplished Miss Farren would be very superfluous ;—no person ever has more successfully performed the elegant levities of *Lady Townly* upon the stage, or more happily practiced the amiable virtues of *Lady Grace* in the highest circles of society.

GEORGE COLMAN the Younger : 'Random Records,'
vol. i., chap. 7, pp. 251-2.

Her memory ought to be cherished among the players, not so much on account of her eminence in

the profession, as for the example she set in the propriety of her conduct which, notwithstanding all the temptations which surrounded her, was so unblemished as to make her elevation to an ancient coronet seem almost a becoming reward. Her person was thin, genteel and above the middle stature ; her countenance expressive and full of sensibility ; her voice clear but rather sharp and unvaried : her action not awkward, and her delivery emphatic and distinct. In the ladies of comedy she had no competitor ; they were, however, all much alike, and equally remarkable for that sensitive delicacy which may be said to have been her distinguishing characteristic ; in other parts, though always respectable, she could never exhibit anything like that splendor which fascinated in her proper walk. With this event [her marriage] her biography, according to the plan of this work, should conclude, but it would look like stinted praise to amiable merit, were it omitted to be mentioned that, in real dignity, she conducted herself as elegantly deserving of admiration as in the mimic scene. Queen Charlotte, the most rigid discriminator of female worth, received her with marks of special recognition, and it must be regarded as a peculiar honor, conferred for the blamelessness of her professional life, that she was selected to make one in the procession at the marriage of the Princess Royal.

JOHN GALT : 'Lives of the Players,' *vol. ii.*, Miss Farren.

Miss Farren was one of the most elegant actresses that ever graced a theatre—and the best representative of a Fine Lady—her person was tall and genteel,

but rather too thin—her face was expressive and beautiful—her voice powerful, tho' mellow and feminine—her pronunciation was perfectly articulate and her manner of speaking most correct. She was not only excellent in gay comedy, but was likewise unequalled in parts of sentimental distress, such as *Indiana*, *Cecilia*, etc.

P. GENEST: 'History of the Stage,' vol. vii., pp. 297-9.

Miss Farren was, perhaps, the most perfect *fine* lady the stage ever boasted. I have some trouble in making my mind up to this assertion; for, when I read of the witcheries of Mrs. Oldfield, and glance at the kind of comedy she used to play, I am half inclined to retract in favor of the elder school. . . . In fact, our modern stage affords us no fine lady; General Burgoyne's 'Heiress' is the nearest to it, but it is deficient in spirit. I should like to have heard Miss Farren's 'niminy piminy,' though. . . . Certainly, in modern times the three best actresses in comedy,—I will not say comic actresses, I don't like the phrase,—were Mrs. Jordan, Mrs. Abington, and Miss Farren. . . . Can I describe them? Mrs. Jordan's comedy was all genuine feeling; a bubbling up of the animal spirits from a mind open to the joyous side of everything, and a heart ever beating and throbbing with kindly impressions; Mrs. Abington's was more intellectual, poignant wit, keen repartee, gladiatorial conversation were her *forte*; while Miss Farren's was graceful, yet lively, with a wit chastened by good manners, and an air in all, of polished refinement.

WILLIAM ROBSON: the 'Old Play-goer,' Letter 7.

Talking over this with Mrs. Fitzhugh one day, she told me a comical incident of the stage life of her friend, the fascinating Miss Farren. The devotion of the Earl of Derby to her, which preceded for a long time the death of Lady Derby, from whom he was separated, and his marriage to Miss Farren, made him a frequent visitor behind the scenes on the nights of her performances. One evening, in the famous scene in *Joseph Surface's* library in the 'School for Scandal,' when *Lady Teazle* is imprisoned behind the screen, Miss Farren, fatigued with standing, and chilled with the dreadful draughts of the stage, had sent for an arm-chair and her furs, and when this critical moment arrived, and the screen was overturned, she was revealed, in her sable muff and tippet, entirely absorbed in an eager conversation with Lord Derby, who was leaning over the back of her chair.

FRANCES ANN KEMBLE: 'Records of a Girlhood,'
chap. 21.

Whilst Mrs. Siddons might be said thus to struggle to keep up with her own the fame of English tragedy, the other muse was about to suffer a loss which THIRTY years have scarcely shown a tendency to replace. I mean the elevation of Miss Farren to a coronet by her marriage with the Earl of Derby, in the year 1797. Perhaps I do not refer effects to causes inadequate to their production when I say that this theatrical demise absolutely produced the degeneracy of comedy into farce. The *lady* of our Congreves lost that court-like refinement in manners, that polished propriety in speech—the coarser parts in comedy were forced forward without a balance, without contrast—cultivated

life on the stage became insipid as soon as its representative was without the necessary charms. This with the natural tendency of revolutionary feelings to degrade everything, produced the absolute fall of genteel comedy, which had long been in a state of decline, and broad laughter reigned triumphant in the unbounded hilarity of Mrs. Jordan.

JAMES BOADEN : ‘Life of Siddons,’ vol. ii., chap. 19.

On March 14, 1797, the long tarrying Countess departed this life ; on the 8th of April following, Miss Farren took final leave of the stage in *Lady Teazle*. After the play Wroughton led her forward, and spoke a few farewell words for her, at the end of which she gracefully curtseyed to all parts of the house ; and that once little girl who carried milk to her father in the Round House, went home and was married to the Earl on the May Day of the year in which he had lost his first wife ! Six weeks ’twixt death and bridal ! and yet we hear that Miss Farren’s greatest charm consisted in “her delicate, genuine, impressive sensibility, which reached the heart by a process no less certain than that by which her other powers effected their impression on their fancy and judgment.”

At all events Miss Farren never acted so hastily, nor Stanley so uncourteously to the memory of a dead lady, as on this occasion ; and it was not one for which the youthful widower might find an apology, for the erst strolling actress was considerably past thirty, and her swain within five years of the age at which *Sir Peter* married “my lady.”

DR. DORAN : ‘Annals of the Stage,’ vol. ii., chap. 15.

DORA JORDAN.

1762—1816.

To make the sullen laugh, the harden'd feel,
Lo ! Jordan comes, amidst the palmy peal.
Her, though no happiness of form or face
Endows with tragic dignity and grace ;
Yet perfect judgment and a feeling mind
Proclaim her buskin of no vulgar kind.
Siddonian majesty, Siddonian fire,
The scowling glance that darts its sparkles dire,
These Jordan owns not : and too loud declaims,
When at the tragic tone her accent aims.
But when see drops her daggers, palls, and tombs,
And her light leg the comic sock assumes,
Then unforc'd nature no false color needs ;
All let her act, who then in all succeeds,
Yet, Muse, be candid—faults e'en then appear ;
Oft a harsh accent grates th' unwilling ear ;
Too much a vixen seems the *Country Wife* ;
The *Romp* breaks out amidst politer life ;
Remains of *Nell* in *Teazle* we may see,
And titles courtsey with a grocer's knee.
Yet since high Farren vanish'd from our sight,
To be, not act, the belle of life polite,
Who now with jocund Jordan dares dispute
The mighty palm of Farren's substitute ?
The 'Thespiad,' (1809).



DORA JORDAN
As Peggy in "The Country Girl."

DORA JORDAN.

M. S.

Dorotheæ Jordan
Quæ per multos annos
Londini, inque aliis
Britanniæ Urbibus,
Scenam egregie ornavit ;
Lepore comico,
Vocis suavitate,
Puellarum hilarium,
Alteriusque sexūs,
Moribus, habitu, imitandis,
Nulli secunda :

* * * *

E vitâ exiit
Tertio nonas Julii 1816
Annos nata 50
Mementote.
Lugete.

To begin a biography with an epitaph may seem a reversal of the natural order of things, but this inscription composed by Mr. Genest "with the assistance of a friend, who was a much better scholar than himself," sums up the art of Mrs. Jordan with such completeness and dignity, that one could scarcely strike a better opening chord. Its reticence is as significant

as its utterance. The fine old cleric dwells with the decorum of Latinity on her hoydens and her “breeches parts ;” and then he adds in one of his quaint notes “all mention of her fine ladies was purposely omitted—as Wilkinson says of Mrs. Cibber’s—they are better forgotten.” Her merits and limitations are in this way fully summed up : she was easily first of her time in the comedy of fantasy whether boisterous or poetic, but in the comedy of manners she took a lower place. As the comedy of fantasy is a rarer gift and demands a more specific natural endowment than the comedy of manners, she held by right the eminence on which contemporary opinion placed her, and worthily played *Thalia* to the *Melpomene* of Mrs. Siddons.

Dorothy, or as she used to sign herself, Dora Jordan, was born, according to most authorities, in the year 1762, near Waterford. Another account states that she was born in London in 1764, and Genest’s epitaph indicates 1766 as the date. Her father, Mr. Bland, is said to have been an Englishman of good family who made a runaway match with her mother, a Welsh clergyman’s daughter, and, being under age at the time, was afterwards able to have the union annulled. so as to marry an heiress in his own station of life. There is a good deal of mystery about all this. Tate Wilkinson states that in Dublin in 1758 he acted *Othello* to the *Desdemona* of Mrs Jordan’s mother, then Miss Grace Phillips ; and Mr. Pryse Lockhart Gordon (Personal Memoirs, vol. i., p. 341) speaks of her father being employed as a scene-shifter in the Cork Theatre during his daughter’s temporary engagement there in 1778. Her mother alleged the fear of offending

her father's family as a reason for her not appearing under the name of Bland, but on the other hand the father's family does not seem to have done anything for either mother or daughter to make them eager to retain their good graces. We may perhaps conjecture that the marriage so easily annulled was defective in other respects besides the minority of the parties,* and that the scene-shifter father of 1778 either was, or purported to be a step-father. Be this as it may, Mrs. Jordan made her first appearance under the name of Miss Francis, at the Crow Street Theatre, Dublin, in 1777, her part being *Phœbe* in 'As You Like It.' Boaden asserts that she very soon seceded to the rival theatre, but this is almost certainly a mistake.

In a pirated version of Sheridan's 'Duenna,' produced by the Crow Street manager, Ryder, during the same season, under the title of the 'Governess,' she played the part of *Lopez*. We learn from Walker's *Hibernian Magazine*† that in November, 1780, she was a member of Ryder's company, and that she played *Celia* in 'As You Like It' (still at Crow Street), on March 15, 1781. There is no evidence, then, to show that she joined Daly's company at Smock Alley earlier than the season 1781-2, when she played *Adelaide* in Jephson's 'Count of Narbonne,' to Kemble's *Raymond*.

It is said that the persecution of Daly, a managerial

* It is noteworthy that Mr. P. L. Gordon states that she played at Cork under the name of Miss Phillips, her mother's maiden name.

† 1780, p. 606, and 1781, p. 146. Her biographers have hitherto accepted Boaden's account of her novitiate without examination. Its very vagueness renders it suspicious, and it is certainly wrong in one particular—that of attributing the pirated version of the 'Duenna' to Daly instead of Ryder.

Don Juan, drove her from Dublin. In July, 1782, she and her mother called upon Wilkinson at Leeds, and requested an engagement. To his inquiry whether her line was tragedy, comedy or opera, she answered unhesitatingly, "all," and used afterwards to say, in telling the story of the interview, "Sir, in my life, I never saw an elderly gentleman more astonished." He took her at her word, however, and she was announced to appear on July 11 as *Calista* in the 'Fair Penitent,' and to sing a song called the 'Greenwood Laddie.' In both these efforts, but especially in the song, she won the hearts of the audience, and was instantly engaged by Wilkinson for a term of three years. At Leeds she appeared as Miss Francis, but at York shortly afterwards it was thought advisable that she should take brevet rank as "Mrs.," and some joke of Wilkinson's as to her having "crossed the Jordan," led to her assuming that name. During her three years on the York Circuit she was moderately, but not excessively popular with her audiences, especially in male parts, such as *Arionelli* in the 'Son-in-Law,' *Lionel* in 'Lionel and Clarissa,' and *Patrick* in the 'Poor Soldier.' She also played tragic characters, such as *Zara (Zaire)* and *Jane Shore*. It was as *Patrick* that she made her last appearance under Wilkinson's management, at Wakefield, Sept. 9, 1775. She came to London full of diffidence. "Gentleman Smith" had seen her as *Priscilla Tomboy*, in the 'Romp' and admired her greatly; but on the other hand, Yates and Mrs. Siddons had spoken slightlyingly of her. She made her first appearance at Drury Lane on Oct. 17, 1785, as *Peggy*, in the 'Country Girl,' and rapidly attained the greatest popularity. Her

professional career was now one of uninterrupted success. She saved Drury Lane from suffering by the popularity of Mrs. Siddons, as the Théâtre Français afterwards suffered by the popularity of Rachel ; that is to say, her attraction drew the public to the theatre even on the nights when the tragic queen was not acting. She appeared at Drury Lane every season (except that of 1806-7) from 1785 to 1809, and at Covent Garden in 1810-11, 1812-13, and 1813-14, making successful provincial tours in the summer vacations. The following is a list of her memorable parts : In 1785-6, *Peggy*, *Viola*, *Imogen*, *Priscilla Tomboy*, *Bel-lario* ('*Philaster*'), *Miss Hoyden* ('*Trip to Scarborough*'), *Hypolita* ('She Wou'd and She Wou'd Not') : in 1786-7, *Miss Prue* ('*Love for Love*'), *Roxalana* (the '*Sultan*'), *Rosalind* : in 1787-8, *Sir Harry Wild-air* : in 1788-9, **Beatrice* (the '*Panel*'), *Nell* (the '*Devil to Pay*') : in 1789-90, *Letitia Hardy*, **Little Pickle* (in a farce called the '*Spoiled Child*', attributed to herself, but more probably the work of Bickerstaff), *Lydia Languish* : in 1790-1, **Celia* (in an adaptation of the '*Humorous Lieutenant*', called the '*Greek Slave*'), *Sylvia* ('*Recruiting Officer*') : in 1794-5, *Helena* ('*All's Well*') : in 1795-6, *Fidelia* ('*Plain Dealer*'), **Flavia* (in Ireland's '*Vortigern*'), *Juliet* (for her benefit), *Ophelia* : in 1796-7, *Lady Teazle* (Miss Farren having retired on April 8, 1797, Mrs. Jordan was enabled, says Genest, "to throw herself into a line of acting for which she was by no means qualified") : in 1797-8, **Angela* ('*Castle Spectre*'), *Bizarre* ('*Inconstant*'), *Beatrice* ('*Much Ado*''), *Dorinda* (In Kemble's version of Dryden and Davenant's version of the '*Tempest*') : in

1798-9, *Lady Harriet* (the 'Funeral'), **Cora* ('Pi-zarro'): in 1799-1800, *Miss Hardcastle*: in 1801-2, *Biddy Tipkin* ('Tender Husband'), *Violante* (the 'Wonder'): in 1802-3, *Mrs. Sullen* ('Beaux Stratagem'), *Miranda* ('Busy Body'), *Sophia* ('Road to Ruin'): in 1803-4, *Charlotte* ('the Hypocrite'): in 1807-8, *Cicily Homespun* ('Heir-at-Law'): in 1814, —at Bath—*Clarinda* ('Suspicious Husband'). Following Genest's example, I have marked with an asterisk those parts which, in the language of the stage, she created, but the great majority of her creations were in plays now forgotten or known only to specialists, and are therefore not included in this list. One or two trivialities (such as *Beatrice*, in the 'Panel,' and *Nell* in the 'Devil to Pay') find a place because they ranked among her most popular parts.

Of Mrs. Jordan's private life little need be said. It was irregular, but never loose. Passing over the mythical accounts of her early life in Ireland, which at worst represent her as more sinned against than sinning, we know that she was for some years the mistress of Mr. (afterwards Sir Richard) Ford, and that from 1790 till 1811 she was the mistress, on such terms as practically amounted to a morganatic marriage, of the Duke of Clarence, afterwards William IV. In both these connections her conduct was as self-respecting as it could possibly be under the circumstances. Her separation from Mr. Ford was not a case of faithlessness, but may rather be termed a divorce by mutual consent; and during the twenty years of her life with the Duke of Clarence at Bushy, her fidelity to the bond she had assumed was unimpeachable. The beginning of this connection led to a

slight break in the cordiality of her relations with her audiences. She was suspected of neglecting her engagements without legitimate cause, and only averted a hostile demonstration by addressing the audience (Dec. 10, 1790,) and assuring them "on her honor, that she had never absented herself one minute from the duties of her profession, but from *real* indisposition." In 1811, too, she was compelled to publish a denial of certain injurious rumors as to the details of her separation from her "protector," vindicating both his conduct and her own. She seems, in truth, to have been sincerely attached to the Duke of Clarence. Immediately after the separation, which was a very serious shock to her, she writes: "We never had, for twenty years, the semblance of a quarrel." She was an affectionate mother, not only to the "Fitzclarence" family (ten in number), but also to the three daughters who were born before 1790. In portioning these three daughters on their marriage she expended most of her savings, and it was the misconduct of two of her sons-in-law (first Mr. Alsop, and then Mr. March), which reduced her to the pecuniary straits in which she died. She left England in August, 1815, accompanied by a lady who had been her children's governess, intending to remain abroad until her affairs were arranged. A series of family misunderstandings delayed this arrangement and depressed her spirits. After passing some time at Boulogne, she proceeded to Versailles and ultimately to St. Cloud, living in strict privacy, but not, as has been supposed, in the pinch of poverty; it is clear, at least, that ample funds were at her command had she chosen to draw upon them. Grief and anxiety, however, preyed upon her mind,

and left her no strength to resist an attack of jaundice to which she succumbed, July 3, 1816. She was buried at St. Cloud, and Genest's epitaph, already quoted, was carved upon her tomb.

There is a cloud of witnesses to Mrs. Jordan's personal fascination, her 'witchery.' " 'Pray sir,' said a young lady to me, 'was Mrs. Jordan critically handsome?' " My answer," says Boaden, " was the absolute truth—'Dear madam, had you seen her as I did, the question would never have occurred to you!'" "Her voice," says Lamb, "sank, with her steady, melting eye, into the heart." Hazlitt calls her "the child of nature, whose voice was a cordial to the heart because it came from it rich, full, like the luscious juice of the rich grape; to hear whose laugh was to drink nectar; whose smile 'made a sunshine' not 'in the shady place,' but amidst dazzling lights and in glad theatres: —who 'talked far above singing,' and whose singing was like the twang of Cupid's bow. Her person, he adds, 'was large, soft, and generous like her soul. . . . She was all exuberance and grace, 'her bounty was as boundless as the sea; her love as deep.'" "The immediate felicity of Mrs. Jordan's style," says Leigh Hunt, "consists perhaps in that great excellence of Mr. Bannister which I have called heartiness; but as the manner of this feeling is naturally softened in a female, it becomes a charming openness mingled with the most artless vivacity. . . . Her voice, pregnant with melody, delights the ear with a peculiar and exquisite fulness. . . . Her heart always precedes her speech, which follows with the readiest and happiest acquiescence." "Her common speech," says that keen and sympathetic critic, the Old Play-goer, William

Robson, "her common speech had more sweetness in it than any other woman's singing. . . . Never did I hear human voice that so completely expressed the word *melody* as that of Dora Jordan. Rich, round, full, clear, and yet so soft! I know the simile is stale, but to nothing can I compare it but the full *jug, jug, jug* of the nightingale. . . . There was a slight provincialism,* a just perceptible breadth too in her speech, and yet it offended not the ear. . . . Truthfulness was her great charm. . . . I don't think she could have played an ill-natured part, she could never have reduced the swell of her voice to the necessary thinness. . . . She was no stage-romp, she was Nature's; when her figure possessed the lightness of Romney's portrait, what a revelry must have been her comedy! She was not what is generally called a singer," he continues; but "there was no need of helping strain to eke out voice or fill up deficiencies; the full, sweet sound stole around the largest theatres, and called soft echoes from their most secret recesses. I say *stole*, for Mrs. Jordan's voice was not like that of Mrs. Wrighton or others, which by their power and brilliancy could penetrate everywhere; there was not the least sharpness in it; it rolled like a mild vapor and encircled you." "Her voice," Macready† tells us, "was one of the most melodious I ever heard, which she could vary by certain bass tones, that would have disturbed the

* Boaden says that this was not *provincial dialect*, but *humorous delivery*, "on the principle of giving to certain words a fulness and comic richness."

† Macready bears witness against the theory that her art was unstudied or improvised. "He had seen her," says Lady Pollock in 'Macready as I knew him,' "insist upon the repetition of a scene twenty times in order to make sure of the effect of her exit."

gravity of a hermit ; and who that once heard that laugh of hers could ever forget it ? The words of Milman would have applied well to her, ‘Oh, the words laughed on her lips !’ ” “ Her acting,” says Boaden once more, “ was *heart* in action ; and its pulsations vibrated to the extremities of its theatrical habitation.”

Opinions are less unanimous as to the parts in which she excelled. That she was, in Byron’s phrase, a “superlative” hoyden, is unquestioned ; but as to her Shaksperean comedy, her fine ladies, and her tragedy, there is much dispute. Sir Joshua Reynold’s opinion that in her “tender and exquisite *Viola*” she did “as much by the music of her melancholy as by the music of her laugh,” is supported by Charles Lamb’s immortal panegyric on her in this part. On the other hand, “Anthony Pasquin,” though otherwise appreciative, tells us that—

For *Imogen’s* woes, or fair *Viola’s** wit,
The decrees of Propriety marked her unfit.

Her *Rosalind* was preferred to that of Mrs. Siddons ; Leigh Hunt speaks highly of it ; William Robson declares that “there never was, there never will be, *there never can be*” her equal in the part ; and yet against all this we have her own testimony noted by John Taylor (‘Records of my Life,’ vol. i., p. 207), who states that on his speaking to her of “public taste” one night when she was dressed for *Rosalind*, she

* Leigh Hunt (*Examiner*, June 5, 1808,) severely criticises her costume in *Viola*. “She appeared in thin white breeches and stockings that fitted her like her own skin, and just over her waist hung a vest, still thinner, of most transparent black lace. I shall not be exact in my description lest I should appear to be writing upon anatomy. . . . *Viola* should have been really disguised, and not undressed as a woman under pretence of being dressed as a man.”

replied, "Oh ! Mr. Taylor, don't mention public taste, for if the public had any taste how could they bear me in the part which I play to-night, and which is far above my habits and pretensions?" She confessed, says Boaden, to "a hankering after tender parts." Her *Imogen* was not a success, and she seems to have acted *Helena* only once ; but on the other hand, Charles Lamb and Leigh Hunt both praise her *Ophelia* warmly. When she played *Cora* in 'Pizarro,' Sheridan was "shocked, almost stamping with anger, at everything she said ;" but William Robson looked back with fondness to "the broken-hearted *Cora* weeping over her babe." Almost every one agrees with Genest's low estimate of her fine ladies, Leigh Hunt attributing her deficiency in this line of character to her habit of playing romps and "breeches parts." Robson, however, thought her the best *Lady Teazle* he had ever seen, preferring her to Miss Farren on the ground that she allowed the country belle to show under the veneer of the woman of society ; and in so far Boaden concurs with him. The sum of the matter is probably this : she was an actress supremely endowed with the "Ewig-Weibliche," and irresistible in all parts in which a lavish, genial, vivid femininity was essential or at least admissible.* Where the Woman required either exaltation into the heroine or repression into the fine lady, she was ill at ease. Her critics, it is clear, are all more or less in love with her, and in that fact we can read in epitome the wealth of her endowment and the limitations of her art.

WILLIAM ARCHER.

* Her popularity in male parts apparently conflicts with this theory—but I think only apparently.

Mrs. Jordan is certainly the lucky child of Fortune, lulled, caressed and nursed in the lap of Nature : she is undoubtedly the reigning Thalia of the age, and deservedly so ; and to her comic talents, archness, whim and fancy I submissively bow, and also acknowledge her humanity and goodness to her late parent.— But I am compelled, as Mr. Manager, to declare, like Mr. Foote in his ‘ Devil upon Two Sticks’ (as greatness knows itself) that Mrs. Jordan, at making a bargain, is too many for the cunningest devil of us all.

TATE WILKINSON : ‘ Memoirs,’ vol. ii.

Observing the silence of Colonel Welbred, we called upon him to explain it.

“ I have seen her,” he answered, quietly, “ but in one part.”

“ Whatever it was,” cried Mr. Fairly, “ it must have been well done.”

“ Yes,” answered the Colonel, “ and so well that it seemed to be her real character ; and I dislike her for that very reason, for it was a character that off the stage or on, is equally distasteful to me—a hoyden.”

I had had a little of this feeling myself when I saw her in the ‘ Romp,’ where she gave me in the early part a real disgust ; but afterwards she displayed such uncommon humor that it brought me to pardon her assumed vulgarity, in favor of a representation of nature, which in its particular class seemed to me quite perfect.

MADAME D’ARBLAY : ‘ Diary,’ Jan. 13, 1788.

Mrs. Jordan, also, makes her appearance in this new piece, who had first appeared at Drury Lane

Theatre, that winter, in the character of the *Country Girl*; she fascinated the audience then, she has fascinated them ever since; and let her act what she will, she irresistibly gains your affection. You are blind to her faults, if she has any, and so partial to her merits, that admiration and applause attend her steps. She is not a beauty; her figure is not elegant; she possesses not the polished manners of a fine lady, nor the skill of a fine singer: what is it then, which never fails to captivate, whether she speaks or sings, is grave or playful?—

'Tis the bewitching charm of Jordan all together.

M. J. YOUNG: 'Memoirs of Mrs. Crouch,' vol. i.,
pp. 261-2.

As an actress Mrs. Jordan never had a superior in her proper line. Mrs. Clive no doubt played *Nell* as well as Mrs. Jordan, it was hardly possible for her to have played the part better. Mrs. Jordan's *Country Girl*, *Romp*, *Miss Hoyden* and all characters of that description were exquisite. In breeches parts no actress can be put in competition with her but Mrs. Woffington—and to Mrs. Woffington she was superior in point of voice, as Mrs. Woffington was superior to her in beauty. Mrs. Jordan's voice was not only sweet, but distinct; she articulated particularly well, though she was not a professed singer, yet the little songs, which she frequently introduced, were much admired. She was never handsome, but she was peculiarly pleasing, and as Wilkinson says, she sported the best leg ever seen on the stage. She latterly grew too fat and large for the breeches characters—

this was her misfortune not her fault—but when, on Miss Farren's retirement, she threw herself into genteel comedy, she betrayed a lamentable want of judgment. She was so consummate an actress that she could do nothing badly—nay, she was even well received in such characters—but she certainly did herself no credit. When in any particular point she wished to be spirited and comic, she was obliged, in spite of herself, to resume her natural manner, which was anything but elegant.

P. GENEST : ‘History of the Stage,’ vol. viii., pp. 430–31.

The second visit of “the horses” gave me a holiday at Parkgate, and this season, which was not a profitable one, terminated my father’s connection with Birmingham. From thence the company was removed in the Autumn to Leicester, where Mrs. Jordan opened the theatre, acting two nights. If Mrs. Siddons appeared a personification of the tragic muse, certainly all the attributes of Thalia were most joyously combined in Mrs. Jordan. With a spirit of fun, that would have out-laughed Puck himself, there was a discrimination, an identity with her character, an artistic arrangement of the scene that made all appear spontaneous and accidental, though elaborated with the greatest care. Her voice was one of the most melodious I ever heard, which she could vary by certain bass tones, that would have disturbed the gravity of a hermit; and who that once heard that laugh of hers could ever forget it? The words of Milman would have applied well to her—“Oh, the words laughed on her lips!” Mrs. Nesbitt, the charming

actress of a later day, had a fascinating power in the sweetly-ringing notes of her hearty mirth, but Mrs. Jordan's laugh was so rich, so apparently irrepressible, so deliciously self-enjoying, as to be at all times irresistible. Its contagious power would have broken down the conventional serenity of Lord Chesterfield himself.

Our first play was the 'Wonder, a Woman Keeps a Secret,' by Mrs. Centlivre, in which she was the *Violante*. I had to prepare to meet this unrivalled artist in the part of *Don Felix*. This was a trial to me; for I have always felt something like an instinctive reverence for genius, in whatsoever range of art or science it may have developed itself. It is in Macklin's clever comedy of the 'Man of the World,' that *Sir Pertinax MacSycophant* observes, "I never in my life could stand straight in the presence of a great man. I always bowed and bowed," etc. That flexibility of spine before men whom wealth and title makes great to the eyes of many, I have never felt but in the presence of those endowed by nature with that mental superiority which shines out in true genius; I have always labored under the sense of my own comparative littleness, and for a time been oppressed with the idea of my inability to cope with them. I went to work therefore with my usual resolution to do my best with my part, but not without misgivings. At rehearsal I remarked, as I watched this charming actress intently through her first scene, how minute and how particular her directions were; nor would she be satisfied, till by repetition she had seen the business executed exactly to her wish. The moving picture, the very life of the scene was perfect in her mind, and she

transferred it in all its earnestness to every movement on the stage.

When the cue for my entrance as *Felix* was given, it was not without embarrassment that my few first words were spoken ; but her good-nature soon relieved me, for when I expressed the love that wrestled with a suspicious temper in the words, “True love has many fears, and fear as many eyes as fame ; yet sure—I think—they see no fault in thee !” she paused, apparently in a sort of surprise, and with great and grave emphasis, said, “Very well, indeed, sir !” This gave me again my perfect self-possession, and I was able to attend to all her remarks and treasure up the points in which she gave greater prominence to the text. I have seen many *Violantes* since, but where was there one who could, like her, excite the bursts of rapture in an audience, when she recovered from the deadly agony into which her fears of discovery had thrown her, and prepared herself for her triumph over her jealous lover ? The mode in which she taught the *Flora* to act her part was a lesson to make an actress. The trite quotation *laudator temporis acti* is equally thrown, as an accusation or a sneer, in the teeth of those who dwell upon the memory of what no longer exists. But it is not alone upon the strength of my single judgment that I set so high a value on the art which these gifted individuals displayed ; the effect they produced on their audiences was such as succeeding aspirants have never been able to excel. Mrs. Jordan’s engagement was finished by the ‘Belle’s Stratagem,’ in which she acted *Letitia Hardy*.

W. C. MACREADY : ‘Reminiscences,’ chap. iii.,
1811-12.

Mrs. Jordan's *début* and successive characters were all witnessed when she was as perfect in figure as in skill. Her singing was sweet, not powerful. In Wycherley's *Peggy* and in Bickerstaff's *Priscilla Tomboy* and the 'Virgin Unmasked,' she was the model on which others have since obtained favor and reputation. Nothing could be more sweet than her *Viola*: but in the higher walks of the drama, though always good, she was not the highest.

WM. DUNLAP: 'History of the American Theatre,' *chap. 21.*

All the principal actresses that I know of always chose to play *Lady Restless* ['All in the Wrong']; but when Mrs. Jordan was the *Belinda*, you would not remember at the end of the comedy, that *Lady Restless* was even in the piece. Her *Nell*, in the 'Devil to Pay,' was a huge lump of nature throughout. Her making the bed, smoothing it down, admiring the quality of the linen, and the simple expression, "I've often heard of heaven, and this is it," defies description. I have seen many *Jobsons*, but I never saw but one *Nell*.

JOE COWELL: 'Thirty Years Among the Players,' *part. i., chap. 10.*

The mark of this great actress had been made upon all the little caresses of female artifice, that inspire confidence, because they presume ingenuousness: all those sportive enjoyments of bounding youth, and whim and eccentricity, things that are usually done laughingly and provoke the laugh of unavoidable sympathy. Her sphere of observation had for the

most part been in the country, and the ‘Country Girl,’ therefore, became her own in its innocence or its wantonness, its moodiness in restraint, or its elastic movement when free. Her imagination teemed with the notions of such a being, and the gestures with which what she said were accompanied, spoke a language infinitely more expressive than words—the latter could give no more than the meaning of her mind, the former interpreted for the whole being. She did not rise to the point where comedy attains the dignity of moral satire, but *humor* was her own in all its boundless diversity. She had no reserve whatever of modest shyness to prevent her from giving the fullest effects to the flights of her fancy. She drove everything home to the mark, and the visible enjoyment of her own power added sensibly to its effect upon others. Of her beautiful compact figure she had the most captivating use—its spring, its wild activity, its quickness of turn. She made a grand deposit of her tucker, and her bosom concealed everything but its own charms. The redundant curls of her hair, half showing and half concealing the archness of her physiognomy, added to a playfulness which even as she advanced in life could not seem otherwise than natural and delightful. But all this would have been inadequate to her pre-eminence, without that bewitching voice, which blurred out the tones of vulgar enjoyment, or spleen, or resistance, so as to render even coarseness pleasing, or flowed in the sprightly measures of a joy so exhilarating as to dispel dullness in an instant: she crowned all this by a LAUGH so rich and so provoking, an expression of face so brilliant, and that seemed never to tire in giving pleasure, that the sight

of her was a general signal for the most unrestrained delight.

JAMES BOADEN: 'Life of Mrs. Siddons,' vol. ii., chap. 16.

Those who have only seen Mrs. Jordan within the last ten or fifteen years can have no adequate notion of her performances of such parts as *Ophelia*, *Helena*, in 'All's Well that Ends Well,' and *Viola* in this play. Her voice had latterly acquired a coarseness which suited well enough with her *Nells* and hoydens, but in those days it sank, with her steady, melting eye, into the heart. Her joyous parts—in which her memory now chiefly lives—in her youth were outdone by her plaintive ones. There is no giving an account how she delivered the disguised story of her love for *Orsino*. It was no set speech that she had foreseen, so as to weave it into an harmonious period, line necessarily following line, to make up the music; yet I have heard it so spoken, or rather *read*, not without its grace and beauty; but when she had declared her sister's history to be a "blank," and that she "never told her love," there was a pause, as if the story had ended; and then the image of the "worm in the bud" came up as a new suggestion, and the heightened image of "Patience" still followed after that, as by some growing (and not mechanical) process, thought springing up after thought, I would almost say, as they were watered by her tears. So in those fine lines—

Write loyal cantos of contemned love—

Hollow your name to the reverberate hills—

there was no preparation made in the foregoing image for that which was to follow. She used no rhetoric in

her passion ; or it was nature's own rhetoric, most legitimate then, when it seemed altogether without rule or law.

CHARLES LAMB : the 'Essays of Elia,' On Some Old Actors.

And Shakspere's woman, Dora Jordan !

CHARLES LAMB . the 'Essays of Elia,' The Old Actors.

Not many years since, we happened to sit in the stalls of the Princess's Theatre, next to an enthusiastic septuagenarian. . . . He remembered Mrs. Jordan as *Viola* during the zenith of her reputation. We entered into talk, and he volunteered a comparison. Mrs. Jordan, he said, was on the whole, inferior to Mrs. C. Kean. She had greater breadth, higher coloring, more exuberant spirits, and a broad-wheeled laugh peculiar to herself, which bore down everything before it ; but all this, he added, would appear coarse and vulgar to modern ideas of refinement. In personal requisites, in elegance and delicacy of manner, in the grace of sentiment and general finish, the picture was incomplete, and much less agreeable than that presented by her successor.

J. W. COLE : 'Life of Charles Kean,' vol. i., chap. 18, pp. 333-4.

Having mentioned Mrs. Jordan, I will not deny myself the pleasure of saying a few words of respect and regret. Though she did not find me among her warm admirers when she first came upon the London stage, she was not offended at my remarks on her acting, but

had good sense enough to refer sincerity to adulation. Mrs. Jordan, though so full of spirit, and apparently of self-confidence, was by no means vain of her acting. I remember sitting with her one night in the green-room at Covent Garden Theatre, when she was about to perform the part of *Rosalind*, in 'As You Like It.' I happened to mention an actor who had recently appeared with wonderful success, and expressed my surprise at the public taste in this instance. "Oh! Mr. Taylor, don't mention public taste," said she, "for if the public had any taste, how could they bear me in the part which I play to-night, and which is far above my habits and pretensions?" Yet this was one of the characters in which she was so popular.

Mrs. Jordan had a great deal of humor, and related anecdotes with great spirit. She took in good part, and unaffectedly, any comments on her acting. In my opinion, if she had cultivated her talents for plaintive characters, and had studied more the graces of demeanor, she would have been a very interesting representative of the pathetic parts of tragedy, while her genuine comic genius would have qualified her to do justice to the elegant gaiety of *Rosalind*, as well as for the intriguing artifice of the 'Country Wife.'

JOHN TAYLOR: 'Records of my Life,' vol. i., chap. 17.

Mrs. Jordan as a performer who unites great comic powers with much serious feeling, and who in all her moods seems to be entirely subservient to her heart, is not only the first actress of the day, but as it appears to me from descriptions we have of former actresses, the first that has adorned our stage.

LEIGH HUNT: 'Critical Essays,' London, 1809, p. 168.

The two powers have rarely been so beautifully combined as in her ; and yet her tragedy was not tragedy ; she was not a heroine with royal sorrows, but she was a woman with woman's sympathies and woman's affections ; and hearts that were proof against the lofty powers of the higher muse would melt into willing sweet pity or love at her thrilling tones and delicious enunciation. Delicious ! why, her common speech had more sweetness in it than any other woman's singing.

W.M. ROBSON : the 'Old Playgoer.' Letter 7.

When at Chester, a widow with three young children was thrown into prison by a creditor for a small debt, which, with expenses amounted to eight pounds, this Mrs. Jordan paid. On the afternoon of the same day the poor woman was liberated, and as her benefactor was taking her usual walk, the widow with her children followed, and just as Mrs. Jordan had taken shelter in a porch from a shower of rain, dropped on her knees in gratitude to thank her. The children, beholding the emotion of their mother, by their cries made the scene so affecting that Mrs. Jordan, unable to control her feelings, stooped to kiss the children, and slipping a pound note into the mother's hand, requested, in her usual playful manner, that she would go away.

Another person, who had taken shelter under the porch and witnessed the transaction, came forward and said : "Lady, pardon the freedom of a stranger ; but would to the Lord the world were all like thee." His figure bespoke his calling, and she immediately retreated a little, and said : "No, I won't shake hands with you."

"Why?"

"Because you are a Methodist preacher, and when you know who I am, you will send me to the Devil."

"The Lord forbid! I am as you say, a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ, who tells us to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, and relieve the distressed; and do you think I can behold a sister fulfil the commands of my great Master without feeling that spiritual attachment which leads me to break through worldly customs and offer you the hand of friendship and brotherly love?"

"Well, you are a good old soul, I dare say, but I don't like fanatics, and you'll not like me, when I tell you who I am."

"I hope I shall."

"Well then, I am a player."

The preacher sighed.

"Yes, I am a player, and you must have heard of me—Mrs. Jordan is my name."

After a short pause he again extended his hand, and with a complaisant countenance replied :

"The Lord bless thee whoever thou art. His goodness is unlimited. He has bestowed on thee a large portion of his spirit; and as to thy calling, if thy soul upbraid thee not, the Lord forbid that I should."

JOHN GALT: '*Lives of the Players*,' vol. ii., Mrs. Jordan.

Recently at St. Cloud this excellent actress made her awful exit from the stage of life: by whose death the public has lost one of its chief favorites and one of the best comic performers that ever administered to its pleasures. Her talents were first-rate

in the province to which they were properly adapted, and her acting was distinguished by an original yet exact conformity to nature and to character. Her face was regular, intelligent, animated and expressive. Her person was symmetrical in her earlier days, but her stature was low. Her voice was strong yet musical, and her utterance peculiarly clear, distinct and expressive. She sang with natural taste, simplicity and feeling ; and there was a richness of humor and a pleasing vivacity in her manner which always produced the effect she intended. Her laugh was irresistible ; and she was so conscious of its influence in exciting congenial feelings among the audience that she frequently introduced it without appropriate truth, though never without the expected success. With the higher order of refined comedy her habits and indeed her disposition did not correspond, and sensible of her want of due qualifications for that province she ever ascribed her success in characters of such a description to public indulgence, rather than to adequate merit of her own.

European Magazine, July, 1816.

ROBERT WILLIAM ELLISTON.

1774—1831.

ADDRESS
TO R. W. ELLISTON, ESQUIRE,
THE GREAT LESSEE.

"Do you know, you villain, that I am at this moment the greatest man living?"

'WILD OATS.'

Oh ! Great Lessee ! Great Manager ! Great Man !
Oh, Lord High Elliston ! Immortal Pan
Of all the pipes that play in Drury Lane !
Macready's master ! Westminster's high *Dane* !
(As Galway Martin, in the House's walls,
Hamlet and Doctor Ireland justly calls !)
Friend to the sweet and ever-smiling Spring !
Magician of the lamp and prompter's ring !
Drury's Aladdin ! Whipper-in of Actors !
Kicker of rebel-preface-malefactors !
Glass-blowers' corrector ! King of the cheque-taker !
At once Great Leamington and Winston-Maker !
Dramatic Bolter of plain *Bunns* and Cakes !
In silken *hose* the most reformed of *Rakes* !
Oh, Lord High Elliston ! lend me an ear !
(Poole is away, and Williams shall keep clear)
While I in little slips of prose, and verse,
Thy splendid course, as pattern-worker, rehearse !

Bright was thy youth—thy manhood brighter still—
The greatest *Romeo* upon Holborn Hill—
Lightest comedian of the pleasant day,
When Jordan threw her sunshine o'er a play !
When the fair Thalia held a merry reign,
And Wit was at her Court in Drury Lane
Before the day when Authors wrote, of course,
The "Entertainment not for Man but Horse."

JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS.



ROBERT WILLIAM ELLISTON
As Frank Heartall.

ROBERT WILLIAM ELLISTON.

The Micawber, the Alnaschar of the stage, Robert William Elliston united in himself most of the foibles and some of the virtues of his calling. In him the histrionic temperament is seen at its sublimest. Irrepressibly sanguine, recklessly improvident, forever posing before himself and the world, constitutionally incapable of discerning show from substance, vain, self-indulgent, warm-hearted, open-handed, he flits posturing through the annals of the theatre, a consummate comedian, a showman of genius, a magnificent mountebank. All contemporary records confirm Charles Lamb's brilliantly fantastic delineation of the Great Lessee, "the joyousest of once embodied spirits." He was in truth a fantastic figure, and it is not by chance but by a natural fitness, that the champion of fantastic comedy, himself the finest of fantasts, has chosen to immortalize him.

Elliston was born in Orange Street, Bloomsbury, on April 7, 1774. His father, a watchmaker, belonged to a reputable family,—his eldest brother being Master of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge,—but was himself of dissipated habits. At the age of nine, Robert William was sent to St. Paul's School—"thou wert a scholar, and an early ripe one," says Lamb, "under the roof builded by the munificent and pious Colet." The

Master of Sidney, whose favorite he was, destined him for the Church, and to that end fostered his declamatory talents. The accident which determined him towards the stage was his attendance at a class of French, taught by a lady who encouraged her pupils to get up amateur theatricals. The elder Mathews was also a member of this schoolboy company, in which, however, Elliston seems to have taken an undisputed lead, playing such parts as *Pyrrhus* in the ‘Distressed Mother,’ and *Chamont* in the ‘Orphan.’ Some private performances at the Lyceum confirmed his taste for the stage, and in the spring of 1791 he ran away from home and betook himself to Bath in the hope of securing an engagement. He first appeared (April 14) as *Tressel* in ‘Richard III.’ and a fortnight later as *Arviragus* in ‘Cymbeline.’ Though he was well received in both characters, no vacancy could be found for him in the company, so that he accepted an offer from Tate Wilkinson, with whom he remained on the northern circuit for two seasons. Wilkinson, oddly enough, describes him as somewhat lacking, at this period, in “levity and fire, quickness and variety.” In 1793 he returned to Bath, appearing Sept. 26 as *Romeo*. Bath was now his headquarters for about ten years, even after he had made himself a reputation in London. Here he married, in 1796, an assistant dancing-mistress, who immediately started a dancing school on her own account. A month or two later (June 25) the bridegroom made his first appearance in London, at the Haymarket, as *Octavian* in the ‘Mountaineers’ and *Vapour* in the farce of ‘My Grandmother.’ His success was immediate, and developed into fame when, on Aug. 29, he played with great applause the part of

Sir Edward Mortimer in the ‘Iron Chest,’ in which, five months before, Kemble had so notoriously failed at Drury Lane. When the winter theatres opened he transferred his allegiance from Colman to Harris, appearing at Covent Garden, on Sept. 21, as *Sheva* in the ‘Jew.’ He was not a regular member of the company, but played some half-dozen times in the course of the autumn and returned in the intervals to the country, thus holding the anomalous position of a provincial actor starring in the metropolis. In the following season (1797) he played *Shylock* and *Othello* at the Haymarket, after which he did not return to London until 1803. Meanwhile he was the leading actor at Bath, starred in the greater provincial towns, and tried all sorts of managerial experiments in places of less importance. At Weymouth and Windsor he won the favor of the King and court, then, as now, a matter of no small moment. At Shepton Mallet, it is said, he ingeniously “doubled” the parts of *Richard III.* and *Richmond*, and was such a host in himself that “his characters outnumbered his audience.” During Lent in 1798 he delivered lectures at Bath and Bristol “on morals and general criticism.” In short, he was sanguine, self-confident, fluent, facile, indefatigable and irrepressible.

In 1803 he returned to the Haymarket, and in the following year he settled in London, if so restless a being can be said to settle anywhere. In the course of the seasons of 1803 and 1804 he played at the Haymarket such widely diverse characters as *Hotspur*, *Dr. Pangloss*, *Richard III.*, *Young Wilding*, the *Stranger*, *Henry V.*, *Orlando*, *Almaviva*, *Vapid* (the ‘Dramatist’), *Jeremy Diddler*, *Rolla* and *George Barnwell*. On Sept.

20, 1804, he appeared for the first time at Drury Lane in the part of *Rolla*. He remained a member of the Drury Lane company until the theatre was burnt down in 1809 (Feb. 24), creating, among others, the characters of the *Duke Aranza* in Tobin's 'Honeymoon,' and *Mr. H*— in Charles Lamb's unfortunate farce of that name, and playing such varied parts as *Benedick*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Mercutio*, *Charles Surface*, *Faulkland*, *Sir Harry Wildair*, *Young Mirabel*, *Doricourt*, *Archer* and *Lord Townly*. Among his chief successes was a triple part known as *the Three Singles* in a musical entertainment entitled, 'Three and the Deuce,' which he played at the Haymarket in the summer season of 1805. On the very day before the fire at Drury Lane, Elliston had made a successful offer for the lease of the Royal Circus Theatre, Blackfriars Road, which, under the title of the "Surrey," given it in the following season, was the scene of his first managerial triumphs and his place of refuge after his great defeat at Drury Lane. Here he himself appeared in 'the opening season as *Macheath* in a "burletta melodram," founded on the 'Beggar's Opera,' and as *Macbeth* in a similar production borrowed from Shakspere's tragedy ! His appetite for theatrical and other speculations was now insatiable. In the course of the ten years between 1809 and 1819, when he became lessee of Drury Lane, he attempted management with varying success at Croydon, Manchester, Birmingham and Leicester, to say nothing of the Surrey and the Olympic ; he started a "Literary Association" at Bristol and a circulating library at Leamington ; he was on the point of becoming manager of the Vauxhall Gardens ; and he acted as impresario to a dwarf, Simon

Paap, the Tom Thumb of his day. His management of the Surrey was on the whole successful, but a transpontine dominion did not long satisfy his ambition. On April 19, 1813, he opened the Olympic Pavilion (formerly managed by the famous Philip Astley) under the name of Little Drury Lane Theatre, but the Lord Chamberlain, on the remonstrance of the patent theatres, compelled him to close his doors in the following month. Next autumn, however, the theatre was re-opened as the Olympic, and had not Edmund Kean broken his engagement with him to go to Drury Lane, Elliston would have had the distinction of introducing that great actor to the London public. Meanwhile in spite of his managerial opposition to, and occasional conflicts with, the patent theatres, Elliston was one of the leading actors of the Drury Lane company. While Old Drury was being rebuilt, in 1811, he was engaged along with Munden at the Haymarket at a salary of £40 a week, the most notable of his parts being *Pierre*, *Lothario*, *Job Thornberry*, *Captain Absolute* and *Joseph Surface*. When the new Drury Lane Theatre was opened (Oct. 10, 1812), Elliston spoke Lord Byron's famous Accepted Address and played *Hamlet*. He remained a member of the company during the following three seasons, playing *Othello*, *Bolingbroke*, *Mercutio* and *Wilford*, to Kean's *Iago*, *Richard III.*, *Romeo*, and *Sir Edward Mortimer*. It is noteworthy, by the way, that Elliston created the character of *Don Alvar* in Coleridge's 'Remorse' (Jan. 23, 1813).

On the morning of Aug. 7, 1819 (that must have been the date) Elliston met Charles Lamb "near St. Dunstan's Church," grasped his hand and "with a look of significance," said, "'Have you heard the news?'—

then with another look following up the blow, he subjoined ‘I am the future manager of Drury Lane Theatre !’ Breathless as he saw me,” Lamb continues, “he stayed not for congratulation or reply but mutely stalked away, leaving me to chew upon his new blown dignities at leisure. In fact, nothing could be said to it. Expressive silence alone could muse his praise. This was in his *great style*.” He had taken the theatre for fourteen years at a yearly rent of £10,200, with a covenant to expend £1000 in decorating the house before his first season, and £6000 before his second. He opened the theatre on Oct. 4 playing *Rover* in ‘Wild Oats,’ and in the course of the month which elapsed before Kean’s first appearance he played *Ranger*, *Tangent* and *Harry Dornton*. On Nov. 3 Kean appeared as *Richard*, Elliston playing *Richmond*, and the performances of Kean with the great success of an afterpiece named ‘Giovanni in London,’ were the chief features of the season, which brought in a total sum of £44,053 or an average of £220 a night. On June 12, 1820, Elliston played *Pierre* to Kean’s *Jaffier* for the latter’s benefit; and on Aug. 15 he reopened the theatre for an extra season of a month in order that Kean might play a round of his characters before leaving for America. Pope, Dowton, Munden, Braham and Madame Vestris were members of the company during this season, and Junius Brutus Booth appeared with Kean in the farewell performances. Next season (1820-1) Wallack played the “heavy lead,” though Kean appeared once or twice on his return from America. On March 25, four days after its publication, Byron’s ‘Marino Faliero’ was produced with small success; and an injunction in Chancery

prevented its repetition until April 30 when it failed to make any impression and dropped out of the bills after its seventh performance. On the other hand the 'Coronation' spectacle in which Elliston as the First Gentleman in Europe surpassed his great original in sublimity, was repeated forty-four times and filled the treasury. Four hundred persons are said to have been engaged in the performance; and in the Westminster Hall scene, the King and his attendants, among whom was the Champion on horse-back, made their entrance from the back of the pit by means of a platform raised over the heads of the audience. During the season of 1821-22, Kean was again the principal attraction, and Elliston himself seldom appeared except in the 'Coronation' which was revived with great success in order to repair the breach in the finances of the theatre caused by the failure of a three-act musical piece entitled 'Giovanni in Ireland.' In 1822-3 Young shared the leading business with Kean, and Terry and Liston joined the company, the latter making his first appearance as *Tony Lumpkin*. It was now that Elliston's health began to give way. On New Year's day of 1823 he was seized in the theatre with what is described as an epileptic fit, and did not reappear for three weeks. In the following season (1823-4) Elliston played a large number of his best-known comedy parts, and added to them that of *Young Marlow*. Macready and Kean both played frequently (though not together) and Munden took his farewell of the stage. Some money was made, and much criticism incurred, by the production of a spectacular piece the 'Cataract of the Ganges' written by Moncrieff at Elliston's desire "for

the sake of introducing horses and a cataract." It was acted fifty-four times. The season of 1824-5 was chiefly remarkable for the success of Macready in 'William Tell' and for the disturbances caused by Kean's appearance immediately after the Cox scandal. Elliston himself played but seldom. The end of his greatness was approaching. In the season of 1825-6 Wallack was the leading actor, though Booth and Macready appeared a few times, comedy being represented by Liston and Dowton. Ill health and pecuniary troubles prevented Elliston from appearing until April 25, 1826, when he played *Rover*. In the meantime he had been studying the part of *Falstaff*, and 'First part of Henry IV.' was announced for May 11. Tradition speaks wonders of his playing at the last rehearsal, which is said to have delighted and astonished a small but critical audience. At the actual performance he played the part well, though not so brilliantly; but on the repetition of the play (May 15) he was taken ill during the fourth act, and in the fifth sank exhausted on the stage. This catastrophe was commonly attributed to intoxication, but Raymond, the most candid and least flattering of biographers, who in general confesses him a gambler, a toper, and a rake, strenuously asserts that on this particular night Elliston was perfectly sober. Whatever be the truth of the matter (and the certificate of sobriety is endorsed by Macready) it is certain that he never again appeared on the Drury Lane stage. Already for some time the management had been nominally transferred to his son; and a few days after the *Falstaff* fiasco the proprietors of the theatre, on his failure to pay up arrears of rent to the amount of £5,500, took advantage of

their right of re-entry, and he was no longer “the Great Lessee.” Raymond tries to prove that he was hardly dealt with in the matter, that he had spent on the improvement and decoration of the theatre some £16,000 more than his contract bound him to lay out, and that having paid in rent during his seven years’ tenancy £66,000 out of a possible £71,500,* he had proved himself no bad tenant. The truth probably is that the committee believed his star to be on the wane and were therefore determined to insist on the letter of their bond. In the winter of 1826 Elliston went through the Bankruptcy Court. On Whit-Monday of 1827 he resumed the management of the Surrey Theatre, appearing on the first night as *the Three Singles*, and in the course of the first month or so playing *Othello*, *Mercutio* and other legitimate characters. He placed his chief reliance, however, upon musical pieces, melodramas and pantomimes, and his own appearances were rare. His management was on the whole prosperous, even before the production of ‘Black Eye’d Susan,’ Whit-Monday June 8, 1829—(with T. P. Cooke as *William* and Buckstone as *Gnat-brain*), the success of which was unprecedented. This stroke of fortune brightened the last year of Elliston’s life. On June 24, 1831, he played his last part, *Sheva* in the ‘Jew,’ the afterpiece being the two hundred and twenty-first performance of ‘Black Eye’d Susan.’ His death took place only a fortnight later, July 8, 1831. He was buried in St. John’s Church, Waterloo Road, his grave being marked—at his own request, says Lamb—by a Latin epitaph.

* This sum should be £71,400, if, as before stated, the yearly rental was £10,200. Raymond’s arithmetic is apt to be inexact.

In this epitaph “pia Melpomene” and “ante alias orba Thalia” are both represented as weeping by the player’s bier, to indicate his dual excellence in tragedy and comedy. That he had considerable tragic power is beyond doubt. Walter Donaldson, an old actor who published a volume of ‘Recollections’ in 1865, remarks that Elliston was “ill-adapted for tragedy,” but confesses in the same breath that “he was quite original, and could bid defiance to either Cooke or Kemble in a certain number of characters;” adding, “his voice was of superior quality, of great compass, and capable of any intonation, his face noble and his height about five feet ten.” Byron* who could “conceive nothing better than Elliston in gentleman’s comedy,” praises him also “in some parts of tragedy.” His striking success in the ‘Iron Chest’ suffices by itself to prove that he was not deficient in power, but he was doubtless better in such parts as *Romeo*, *Hamlet* and *Hotspur*—what the French call *grand jeune premier* parts—than in *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *Richard III*. Notwithstanding the “noble face” attributed to him by Donaldson, it has been said with evident truth that he was a tragedian in spite of his features, which were cast in the comic mould. His eye had a roguish twinkle, his nose was “tip-tilted,” his mouth was full and unctuous, his chin ample. It is as a comedian, too, that he lives in the records of most of his contemporaries, a comedian of all calibres, from the insinuating rogue to the agreeable rattle, from the mercurial to

* Quoted in Clark Russell’s ‘Representative Actors.’ After some search, I have failed to verify the quotation, but it is clear that Byron held a high opinion of Elliston, as it was at the poet’s urgent request that the Address on the opening of the new Drury Lane was entrusted to him.

the Macchiavellian. "Elliston," says Hazlitt, "is an actor of great merit, and of a very agreeable class : there is a joyousness in his look, his voice and manner; he treads the stage as if it was his 'best-found and latest as well as earliest choice ;' writes himself comedian in any book, warrant, or acquittance ; hits the town between wind and water, between farce and tragedy ; touches the string of a mock heroic sentiment with due pathos and vivacity ; and makes the best strolling gentleman, or needy poet, on the stage. His *Rover* is excellent : so is his *Duke* in the 'Honeymoon ;' and in 'Matrimony' he is best of all." And again the same critic remarks : "Mr. Elliston never shines to more advantage than in light, genteel farce, after Mr. Kean's tragedy." At the famous rehearsal at Drury Lane, Elliston's *Falstaff* compelled the admiration even of Macready ; and a writer signing himself "M." in the *New Monthly Magazine* for 1836 (Vol. 48), who tells us that *Falstaff* fell at Drury Lane "only to rise at the Surrey," enlarges on the merits of his performance at the transpontine house. "What a combination," he cries, "of the wit, the humorist, the sensual feeder, the worldly philosopher, and the *gentleman*! The *Falstaff* of other actors is the mere cookshop *Falstaff*; the *Falstaff* of Elliston might, if he pleased, have attended levees."* An actor who can pass with credit from *Hamlet* to *Falstaff*, from *Iago* to *Puff*, and can play *Joseph*

* The Surrey play-bills at the British Museum contain no mention of this performance, but they are far from complete. There is a gap between Dec. 27, 1828, and May 1, 1829, during which the revival of 'Henry IV., Part I.' may quite well have taken place, especially as "M." is positive and circumstantial on the point. On Shakspere's birthday, 1831, Elliston "walked" as *Falstaff* in a Shaksperean Pageant at the Surrey.

Surface and *Charles* his brother with equal mastery, falls scarcely short of Garrick himself in versatility. As a manager, Elliston marks the transition from the good old days of the patent theatres to our “railroad times of puff and ‘boom.’” Arts of advertisement which we are accustomed to think strictly modern were familiar to him. During his first management at the Surrey he paid £688 for two suits of armor, which, being duly paragraphed no doubt, made the success of the production in which they appeared. On Kean’s return from America, Elliston arranged a procession to receive him and bring him in triumph to Drury Lane. It was Kean and Elliston between them who introduced and confirmed the system of big capitals and “star lines” in play-bills. Elliston’s play-bills, indeed, were marvels of audacious puffery. Hazlitt makes several scathing comments on “Mr. Elliston’s assumptions” and “Mr. Elliston’s gasconades,” while even the mild and tolerant Genest cannot refrain from remarking “Elliston’s puffs in the play-bills were so extravagant as to be contemptible.” He was, moreover, an inveterate speech-maker. He felt himself completely in his element when stepping forward with his hand on his heart to flatter, or cajole, or befool an audience. On no one did his grand manner impose more completely than on himself. It is said that when, in the coronation spectacle, he stretched out his hands over the awestruck pit and exclaimed, “Bless you, my people!” he veritably believed himself no less than the Lord’s anointed. He found the stage, at times, too small for his soaring fantasies, and thought seriously of entering what he himself doubtless described as “the Church or the Senate.” One little

touch in Raymond's portraiture is as least as characteristic as anything recorded by Lamb. On the King's birthday, he gave a dinner at his house in Stratford Place, and when the toast of the evening was drunk, the discharge of a small cannon fixed on the roof bruted to all Oxford Street his loyalty and his magnificence. In this one trait the whole histrion stands revealed.

WILLIAM ARCHER.

Mr. Elliston's peculiar warmth of feeling has rendered him the best lover on the stage, both in tragedy and comedy ; and when we consider the theoretic dominion of love, this single superiority gives an actor a greater range of characters than any one talent he could possess. When Elliston makes love, he appears literally to live in the object before him ; he shows a most original earnestness in his approach and in his devices to his mistress, he enters into all her ideas, he accompanies her speech with affectionate gestures of assent or anticipation, he dwells upon her face while she is talking to another ; in short, he is his fair one's shadow, which obeys her slightest movement with simultaneous acknowledgment.

LEIGH HUNT : 'Critical Essays,' London, 1807, pp. 187-8.

In *Sir Harry Wildair*, for instance, he looked more like a man who could bear rakery and debauch. The engraved portrait of him in a coat bordered with fur is very like. He had dry as well as genial humor, was an admirable representative of the triple hero in 'Three and the Deuce,' of *Charles Surface, Don Felix,*

the *Duke*, in the ‘Honeymoon,’ and of all gallant and gay lovers of a robust order not omitting the most cordial. Indeed, he was the most genuine lover that I ever saw on the stage. No man approached a woman as he did—with so flattering a mixture of reverence and passion—such closeness without insolence, and such a trembling energy in his words. His utterance of the single word “charming” was a volume of rapturous fervor.

LEIGH HUNT : ‘Autobiography,’ vol. i., chap. 6.

Elliston played *Edward* [in the ‘Earl of Warwick’]. He is a fine bustling comedian ; but he bustles also in tragedy.

HENRY CRABB ROBINSON : ‘Reminiscences,’ April 4, 1811, vol. i., chap. 14.

Elliston was the completest *at all*, I remember. Nothing was too high ; no characters too widely different for him to attempt them. I venture without hesitation to say that YOUR experience can furnish you with no such *Ranger*, *Rover*, *Archer*, *Valentine*, *Bob Handy*, *Three Singles* and other such dashing, spirited characters as Robert William Elliston. He had a frank, hearty manner, set off by a good deal of grace, that made his comedy very delightful.

WM. ROBSON : the ‘Old Playgoer.’ Letter 6.

Elliston’s recent triumph in the part of *Duke Aranza*, at Drury Lane, was now succeeded by an event at the Haymarket, only less brilliant from the nature of the drama in which he appeared ; .. musical entertainment, entitled ‘Three and the Deuce.’

This piece had been produced at the same theatre ten years previous to the present ; the principal part, or parts, having been written expressly for the display of Mr. Bannister's versatility of genius ; an experiment, however, which did not meet with a favorable reception.

Elliston, who had heretofore accomplished some triumphs not dissimilar to the present—namely, a decided success on Bannister's own ground—was by no means deterred from the present trial. The fantastic triune impersonation suited admirably his fancy, whilst a desire for emulation gave him additional vigor for the experiment. The versatility of powers (if we may venture so lofty a term) necessary to success in the part of *the Singles*, might very reasonably have attracted public favor to this announcement, for Elliston was both a pleasing singer and an elegant dancer, while his *savoir faire* of the mock heroic and perception of broad farce, all conspired to the fairest results.

The piece was acted for his own benefit, and the trial was another decided hit. Like Diana, the actor was equally divine under his three phases, and the *petite comédie* was, from this time, assigned to him, by legal conveyance of popular approbation, his own freehold.

GEORGE RAYMOND : ‘Life of Elliston,’ *period i.*, *chap. 2.*

Elliston was an actor of what may be termed the Romantic School. Unlike in style, either of his great contemporaries, Kemble or Cooke, he was yet distinguished in some delineations of tragedy, by which

the names of those two actors have become so justly memorable.

Of the commanding presence—the stoicism—which characterized so much the style of Mr. Kemble, and of that classic bearing which, on the Roman scene, rendered him incomparably greater than any English actor history may have handed to us since the days of Betterton, Elliston had no perception. The metaphysical pondering of *Brutus*, the inspelled imaginings of *Macbeth*, were seen in the very form and aspect of Kemble; but the fire of *Hotspur* and chivalry of *Henry V.*, bright as they were in his beautiful portraiture, did not extinguish his fellow in art, who suffered but little by a propinquity to that great master.

Elliston was distinguished for flexibility and variableness of voice, which produced powerful effects; now “the silver-toned Barry,” and now again the manly intonations of Booth.

The mental abstraction which belongs to the character of *Hamlet*, met with a happy delineation in Elliston’s efforts;—his tremulous awe, his impressive accents, when in the presence of his father’s spirit, produced on his auditory a cleaving sympathy; like Betterton, “he made the *Ghost* equally terrible to the spectator as to himself.”

We do not find any great praise given to his impersonation of *Othello*, although he frequently acted the part. If, therefore, we are to conclude that the attempt was not what might be deemed successful, it is but fair to his attainments in other directions, to credit that there were at least some features in it of considerable merit.

Though far short of a *great tragedian*, Elliston was an impressive player of tragic parts. If not *Cato*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*, or *Melantius*, he was *Juba*, *Edgar*, *Macduff*, and *Amintor*, without a superior. In the character of *Amintor*, full of those inconsistencies and weaknesses, which, as in that of *Jaffier*, not unfrequently give a peculiar interest to the scene, Elliston won the praise of his auditors ; and the manner and force in which he delivered one speech, was always a point of admiration. He addresses *Evadne* on her remorse :—

——— Do not mock me,
Though I am tame, and bred up with my wrongs,
Which are my foster-brothers, I may leap,
Like a hand-wolf, into my native wildness,
And do an outrage. Prithee, do not mock me !

His *Falconbridge* was good ; but Mr. Charles Kemble has so far excelled all actors we have on record, in this particular delineation, that we venture not a momentary hazard with him.

Ibid.

As a comedian, Elliston was, perhaps, never excelled, and it may be, he will never be equalled. Of this we have endeavored so particularly to speak in various parts of this history, that it will be unnecessary here to renew the question. Of *Felix*, *Aranza*, *Rover*, *Rapid*, *Sheva*, *Belcour*, *Charles Surface*, *Leon*, *Tangent*, *Wilding*, *Dowlas*, *Dornton*, *Valentine*, *Lothario*, *Absolute*, etc., etc., and last, the celebrated rehearsal of *Falstaff*, we have spoken in their proper places. In the romantic drama, Elliston, at an early period of his life, was greatly attractive : his *Octavian*, and *Sir Edward Mortimer* — the peculiar circumstances, too, under

which he played this latter character—would alone have entitled him to the name of an accomplished actor.

In the “business” of the stage, Elliston was always popular. He was, what is called a “fair actor,”—never appropriating the scenic effects of others, but always playing in such a manner as might bring into best operation the professional merits of those around him. This fact, and a total absence of jealousy towards rising actors, rendered him always popular with his brethren. One thing further we may be permitted to observe (for with those at all acquainted with theatrical life, it will doubtless be a claim of commendation): Elliston never was guilty of the coarse and ungentlemanly act (to say the least of it) of common swearing. No one ever heard an oath pass his lips; and though he lived in too great neglect of religious observances, no man was readier to respect those of better example than himself, and he was the very last to treat with levity any question of a sacred nature.

We may, in fine, term him as a kind of dramatic Alcibiades; great versatility, eccentric enterprise, strange inconsistencies, with a fervent devotion to the public duties to which fortune had called him, constituted him in his time, if not an exemplary general, at least a brilliant soldier.

Ibid., period iii., chap. 2.

Elliston, now making his way to the theatre for the purpose of superintending all things necessary for the reception of his august patrons, went straight into the King’s box; and on perceiving a man fast asleep in his Majesty’s chair, was about recalling him to his

senses, in no gentle manner, when, very fortunately, he recognized the King himself.

What was to be done? Elliston could not presume to wake his Majesty—to approach him—speak to him—touch him, impossible! and yet something was necessary to be attempted, as it was now time the theatre should be lit.

Elliston hit on the following expedient: taking up a violin, from the orchestra, he stepped into the pit, and placing himself just beneath his truly exalted guest, struck up, *dolcemente*, ‘God Save the King!’ The expedient had the desired effect: the royal sleeper was gently loosened from the spell which had bound him; and awaking, up he sprang, and, staring the genuflecting comedian full in the face, exclaimed, “Hey! hey! hey! what, what! Oh, yes! I see, Elliston—ha! ha! rain came on—took a seat—took a nap. What’s o’clock?”

“Approaching six, your Majesty.”

“Six!—six o’clock!” interrupted the King. “Send to her Majesty—say I’m here. Stay—stay—this wig won’t do,—eh, eh? Don’t keep the people waiting—light up—light up—let ‘em in—let ‘em in—ha! ha! fast asleep.—Play well to-night, Elliston! Great favorite with the Queen. Let ‘em in—let ‘em in.”

The house was presently illuminated—messengers were sent off to the royal party, which, in a short lapse of time, reached the theatre. Elliston then quitted the side of his most affable monarch; and dressing himself in five minutes for his part in the drama, went through his business with bounding spirit; nor was his glee at all diminished, when, on attending the royal visitors to their carriage, the King once more

nodded his head, saying, “Fast asleep, eh, Elliston!—fast asleep.”

Ibid., period i., chap. 1.

On another night, he acted the ‘Liar,’ and literally played, or rather spoke, the words of every character in the piece! *Miss Godfrey* and *Grantham* were certainly dressed for the parts, and so, after a fashion was *Papillon*; but the two former being lodging-house keepers in Leamington, and the latter, the aforesaid door-keeper’s son, could not be supposed to know much of the author’s text, and as little perhaps of the plot of the drama. Elliston enjoined them only to say nothing, an injunction they obeyed, if we may venture the pun, to the very *letter*, whilst our hero repeated the whole dialogue, sending the dummies off, or beckoning them on, according to their proper exits and entrances. The tact and cleverness with which he accomplished all this gained him, beyond doubt, greater applause than if the piece had been soberly acted.

Ibid., period iii., chap. 1.

Elliston had become proprietor of the Olympic Pavilion, as it was then called, in Wych Street, built originally by old Astley for equestrian performances. At his suggestion I wrote a speaking harlequinade, with songs for the columbine, the subject being ‘Little Red Riding Hood.’ On the first night of its representation (Dec. 21, 1818), every trick failed, not a scene could be induced to close or to open properly, and the curtain fell at length amid a storm of disapprobation. I was with Mr. Elliston and his family in a private box. He sent round an order to the

prompter, that not one of the carpenters, scene-shifters, or property-men were to leave the theatre until he had spoken to them. As soon as the house was cleared, the curtain was raised, and all the culprits assembled on the stage in front of one of the scenes in the piece representing the interior of a cottage, having a door in one half and a latticed window in the other. Elliston led me forward, and standing in the centre, with his back to the foot-lights, harangued them in the most grandiloquent language—expatiated on the enormity of their offense, their ingratitude to the man whose bread they were eating, the disgrace they had brought upon the theatre, the cruel injury they had inflicted on the young and promising author by his side ; then pointing in the most tragical attitude to his wife and daughters, who remained in the box, bade them look upon the family they had ruined, and burying his face in his handkerchief to stifle his sobs, passed slowly through the door in the scene, leaving his auditors silent, abashed, and somewhat affected, yet rather relieved by being let off with a lecture. The next minute the casement in the other flat was thrown violently open, and thrusting in his head, his face scarlet with fury, he roared out, “I discharge you all !” I feel my utter incapacity to convey an idea of this ludicrous scene, and I question whether any one unacquainted with the man, his voice, action, and wonderful facial expression, could thoroughly realize the glorious absurdity of it from verbal description. With Elliston I was extremely intimate for several years, and had great respect for his amiable wife and charming daughters, but our mutual friend, the late George Raymond, has written so exhaustive a life of

this “Napoleon of the Drama,”—so thoroughly described the man, and so industriously collected every scrap of information concerning him, every anecdote connected with him,—that there is only one little incident that I do not find he has mentioned, at least in the edition I possess, and it is so characteristic, that it deserves recording. Within a few hours of his death he objected to take some medicine, and, in order to induce him to do so, he was told he should have some brandy and water afterwards. A faint smile stole over his face, the old roguish light gleamed for a moment in his glazing eye, as he murmured, “*Bribery and corruption.*” They were almost the last intelligible words he uttered. Elliston was one of the best general actors I have ever seen; but the parts in which he has remained unrivaled to this day were the gentlemanly rakes and agreeable rattles in high comedy. His *Ranger*, *Archer*, *Marlow*, *Doricourt*, *Charles Surface*, *Rover*, *Tangent*, and many other such characters, he made his own—and no wonder, for these characters reflected his own.

J. R. PLANCHÉ: ‘Recollections and Reflections,’ vol. i., chap. 3.

I will not attempt, in these brief and hasty notices, to relate the numerous anecdotes told by Kean of his theatrical contemporaries. He frequently mentioned Elliston, and, if not with reverence, he always spoke with gratitude of that singular person. Elliston’s maledictions against the periodical press were in the most approved style of familiar anathema; his method in this way would have served admirably as a manual for “cursing made easy,” to those gentlemen who are

desirous of excelling in that accomplishment. Whenever anything unfriendly to him or his theatre appeared in the newspapers, he would generally speak of it in the greenroom. Kean often gave us good imitations of his manner. "That and that for the newspapers" (snapping his fingers), "we are all friends, and I may therefore say, that the greatest curse upon a theatre, in my opinion, is the — public press." The *Times* particularly excited his ire—"full of morality, personality and advertisements; sending its raw critics to my establishment to see my plays for nothing, and then do the malicious, at a guinea a week." On relating this anecdote, Kean remarked that this was a liberal price for "doing the malicious." For (poor fellow !) many a long year he had to do the heroic, the pathetic, the eccentric, the sentimental, the genteel, the droll, and the jackpudding, for much less than a guinea a week. How he could have done all this, and have existed on so miserable a pittance, is to me unaccountable.

N. P. WILLIS : *New York Mirror*, Aug. 3, 1833.

Elliston's peculiarity seems to have been a love of coming forward, placing his hand on his heart, and addressing the audience on every pretext. One season he had become so popular at the Haymarket that he was obliged to take his benefit at the Opera House. The crowd was so immense that on the doors being opened it swept past the check-takers and filled the theatre. Elliston, of course, came forward, pointed out the loss he must sustain if the audience did not pay, and sent a number of men among them with pewter plates to collect the unpaid dues. When the

curtain drew up, the stage was found blocked with another audience ten file deep. The people in front hissed this violation, amid shouts of "Off, off!" Again Elliston came forward, his hand on his heart, his mouth wreathed with smiles. He said that as Madame Bouti, a foreigner, had been suffered on one occasion to fill *her* stage with friends, he trusted that the same indulgence would be extended to a BRITON. The appeal was irresistible, and the people behind as well as in front cheered. He cleared £600 by this benefit.

W. CLARK RUSSELL : 'Representatative Actors,' pp. 295, 296, *foot notes*.

Nothing will convey so complete an idea of the man as those speeches which he never missed an occasion of addressing to the audience. I cannot forbear quoting one delivered to a noisy gallery, which, in its grandiloquent commencement and intensely common-sense termination, is exquisitely comic : "Ladies and gentlemen, I venture as a most unobtrusive individual to take the great liberty of addressing you. It is of rare occurrence that I deem it necessary to place myself in juxtaposition with you. (Noise in the gallery.) When I said juxtaposition I meant *vis-à-vis*. (Increased noise.) When I uttered the word *vis-à-vis* I meant contactability. Now let me tell you that *vis-à-vis*, which is a French term, and contactability, which is a truly English term, very nearly assimilate each other. (Disturbance redoubled.) Gentlemen, gentlemen, I am really ashamed of your conduct. It is unlike a Surrey audience. Are you aware that I have in this establishment most efficient peace officers at my

immediate disposal? Peace officers, gentlemen, mean persons necessary in time of war. A word to the wise. One word more—if that gentleman in the carpenter's cap will sit down (pointing to pit) the little girl in red ribbons behind him—you, my love, I mean—will be able to see the entertainment."

H. BARTON BAKER, in *London Society*, Nov. 1885.

Elliston was the *Falstaff* of the night—a memorable night, for it was the last of that versatile and once distinguished actor's appearance. His decadence from the position he occupied six years previously, and had held for twenty years as a delightful comedian—unrivalled as the *Duke Aranza*, effective as *Octavian* ('The Mountaineers'), and brilliant as *Doricourt*, *Charles Surface*, etc.,—was painful in the extreme. A life of excitement, stimulated by wine, was approaching its natural termination. Still, he had vigor enough left to render *Falstaff* more effectively than any other actor since the days of the great Henderson; but medicine was nevertheless requisite to sustain him in the task, and on the evening when I appeared as *Hotspur's* menial he was overcome, and fell to the ground, professionally to rise no more. It was in the fifth act that the melancholy incident occurred. He had just uttered the words, "Hal, if thou seest me down in the battle and bestridest me so," when he was vanquished by fatigue and fell on his side. Wallack, who was playing the *Prince*, said, "Why, Jack, you are thinking so much of what may happen in the field, that you are down already!" But Elliston could make no reply. He only grunted and growled. The audience waxed angry, and "Drunk!—off, off!—take him away!"

proceeded from different parts of the house. Wallack went to a wing and summoned four men (I was one of them) to bear Elliston to his room. Wallack then addressed the audience. I well remember the words :—"Ladies and Gentlemen,—I come not to apologize, but to explain—" "Good!—all right!—proceed!" "The extraordinary exertions of Mr. Elliston during the last few days have so overpowered him—" This was too much for John Bull. Laughter, jeers, and the cry of "Drunk, drunk," accompanied by hisses, compelled Wallack to leave the stage. Macready, whose *Hotspur*, by-the-by, fitted one of his irascible temper exceeding well, has declared, in his Memoirs, that Elliston was not "in drink." He had really been ill, and was compelled to resort to anodynes, which, however, were insufficient to give him strength enough to go through the enterprise.

'Autobiography of an Actor,' in the *Theatre*, Sept. 1883.

The management of Drury Lane Theatre had been transferred from Elliston to his son, who, under the committee, now conducted the establishment, Elliston remaining as an actor of the company. The absence of Kean, who had gone to the United States again, made young Elliston very urgent with me to return to Drury Lane; but six weeks were all I could spare to London from my more profitable country engagements, by which I was now enabled to pay off above £1200 of the mortgage remaining on the Granby purchase. 'Macbeth' was the play advertised for my reappearance at Drury Lane on Monday, April 10, followed by the repetition of *William Tell*, *Jaques*, *Leontes*, *Othello*,

Virginius, Leonatus Posthumus, Hotspur, etc. An interest more than ordinary attached to the reproduction of the ‘First Part of King Henry IV.’, from Elliston’s announcement in the part of *Falstaff*. The play was acted on Thursday, May 11. Elliston was an actor highly distinguished by the versatility and power of his performances, but of late years he had somewhat “fallen from his high estate;” still such an announcement stimulated the curiosity of play-goers. His rehearsal gave me very great pleasure. I watched it most earnestly, and was satisfied that in it he made the nearest approach to the joyous humor and unctuous rougery of the character that I had ever witnessed, giving me reason to entertain sanguine hopes of a great success in its performance ; but, alas ! whether from failure of voice or general deficiency of power, the attempt fell ineffectively upon the audience, and the character was left, as it has been since the days of Quin and Henderson, without an adequate representative. The play was repeated on Monday, May 15, 1826. Before the curtain rose I was in the greenroom, and spoke with Elliston, who complained of being ill, and appeared so, smelling very strongly of ether. As the evening wore on he gave signs of extreme weakness, was frequently inaudible, and several times voices from the front called to him to “speak up.” There was not on this occasion even the semblance of an effort at exertion, and in the fifth act he remained silent for some little time, then, in trying to reach the side-scene, reeled round and fell prostrate before the footlights. It was a piteous spectacle ! A sad contrast to the triumphs of his earlier popularity ! The audience generally attributed his fall to intoxication, but without just

cause. He was really indisposed, and the remedy from which he sought support was too potent. He was conveyed to his dressing-room almost insensible, and never appeared upon the stage again.

W. C. MACREADY : 'Reminiscences,' chap. 20, 1826.

To descant upon his merits as a comedian would be superfluous. With his blended private and professional habits alone I have to do, that harmonious fusion of the manners of the player into those of everyday life which brought the stage-boards into streets and dining-parlors, and kept up the play when the play was ended. "I like Wrench," a friend was saying to him one day, "because he is the same natural, easy creature *on* the stage that he is *off*." "My case exactly," retorted Elliston, with a charming forgetfulness that the converse of a proposition does not always lead to the same conclusion. "I am the same person *off* the stage that I am *on*." The inference, at first sight, seems identical; but examine it a little, and it confesses only that the one performer was never, and the other always, *acting*.

And in truth this was the charm of Elliston's private deportment. You had spirited performances always going on before your eyes, with nothing to pay. As where a monarch takes up his casual abode for a night, the poorest hovel which he honors by his sleeping in it becomes *ipso facto* for that time a palace; so wherever Elliston walked, sat, or stood still, there was the theatre. He carried about with him his pit, boxes, and galleries, and set up his portable playhouse at corners of streets and in the market-places. Upon flintiest pavements he trod the boards still; and if his

theme chanced to be passionate, the green-baize carpet of tragedy spontaneously rose beneath his feet. Now this was hearty, and showed a love for his art. So Apelles *always* painted—in thought. So G. D. *always* poetizes. I hate a lukewarm artist. I have known actors—and some of them of Elliston's own stamp—who shall have agreeably been amusing you in the part of a rake or a coxcomb through the two or three hours of their dramatic existence, but no sooner does the curtain fall with its leaden clatter, but a spirit of lead seems to seize on all their faculties. They emerge sour, morose persons, intolerable to their families, servants, etc. Another shall have been expanding your heart with generous deeds and sentiments, till it even beats with yearnings of universal sympathy ; you absolutely long to go home and do some good action. The play seems tedious till you can get fairly out of the house and realize your laudable intentions. At length the final bell rings, and this cordial representative of all that is amiable in human breast steps forth—a miser. Elliston was more of a piece. Did he *play Ranger*? and did *Ranger* fill the general bosom of the town with satisfaction? why should *he* not be *Ranger*, and diffuse the same cordial satisfaction among his private circles? With *his* temperament, *his* animal spirits, *his* good nature, *his* follies perchance, could he do better than identify himself with his impersonation?

Those who knew Elliston will know the *manner* in which he pronounced the latter sentence of the few words I am about to record. One proud day to me he took his roast mutton with us in the Temple, to which I had superadded a preliminary haddock. After

a rather plentiful partaking of the meagre banquet, not unrefreshed with the humbler sort of liquors, I made a sort of apology for the humility of the fare, observing that for my own part I never ate but one dish at dinner. "I too never eat but one thing at dinner," was his reply—then, after a pause, "Reckoning fish as nothing." The manner was all. It was as if by one peremptory sentence he had decreed the annihilation of all the savory esculents which the pleasant and nutritious food-giving Ocean pours forth upon poor humans from her watery bosom. This was *greatness* tempered with considerate *tenderness* to the feelings of his scanty but welcoming entertainer.

Great wert thou in thy life, Robert William Elliston, and *not lessened* in thy death, if report speak truly, which says that thou didst direct that thy mortal remains should repose under no inscription but one of pure *Latinity*. Classical was thy bringing up, and beautiful was the feeling on thy last bed, which, connecting the man with the boy, took thee back to thy latest exercise of imagination—to the days when, undreaming of theatres and managements, thou wert a scholar, and an early ripe one, under the roofs builded by the munificent and pious Colet. For thee the Pauline Muses weep. In elegies that shall silence this crude prose they shall celebrate thy praise.

CHARLES LAMB: the 'Last Essays of Elia.' Ellistoniana.

CHARLES MATHEWS.

1776—1835.

In palsied, superannuated age,
Mimetic Mathews see our eyes engage :
Correct and nat'ral ; with a sober ease,
He pleases, by a carelessness to please.
Whether in Valet sunk, to Marquis rais'd,
As fuddled Sergeant, or as Bard disprais'd ;
Alike in all, his unaffected style
Wins, not a pealing laugh, but placid smile.
For lazy Mathews, sparing of his pains,
Where strength is wanting, half he has, restrains :
And thus, when force we most expect to see,
The flushing promise ends consumptively.
So when the painter stole a pig of lead,
And put dissembled timber in its stead,
Baulk'd by expectance of the usual weight,
Back the poor owner fell, and broke his pate.

The 'Thespiad,' (1809).



CHARLES MATHEWS.

CHARLES MATHEWS.

Mathews at home during the first eighteen years of his life seems to have been as amusing in his way as "Mathews at Home" during the height of his popularity at the Adelphi. Garrick, who only saw him as a child at his father's shop, beheld even then a funny little fellow, with a comical wry mouth that in itself was capital to a comedian. Whether his comedy was the result of a conscientious determination to live up to his features, or was the irrepressible outcome of a humorous nature, it would be difficult to say, for he was as high-minded as he was funny.

Whichever is true, funny he always was, and in spite of discouragements, that would have driven most men distracted—or to tragedy. His fondness for imitation, in which he made his great success, was displayed at a very early age, although it met with small encouragement from his victims. The very twist in his face, which made people laugh before he opened his mouth, was due to a nervous affection that shattered his health for many years. His father was a strict Calvinist, a serious bookseller, who never went to a theatre in his life; and it can readily be understood that he looked with little favor on his son's histrionic predilections.

Yet Charles took comedy parts in school theatricals, in which one of the older boys, Master Elliston,

played leading business. A little later, while a lad in his father's employ, he used to give imitations of leading actors in a private theatre over a stable; and his success here emboldened him in 1790, at the mature age of fourteen,—he was born June 28, 1776,—to apply to Harris, the manager of Covent Garden, for the position of leading comedian. Disappointed in this ambition, he obtained permission to recite before Macklin, then a very old man, whose only comment on his efforts was a prolonged “bow-wow-wow!” which hurt his feelings, but could not dampen his enthusiasm.

He even undertook to edit the *Thespian Magazine*, at the munificent salary of a guinea a month; but spent the rewards of his literary labors in purchasing permission to appear with the regular company at the theatre at Richmond, supporting his friend Litchfield, another amateur, in tragedy, and taking the lead in comedy. Finally, he announced to his father his determination to accept a position offered him in the Dublin Theatre. The father, finding all his pleadings and arguments in vain, said bitterly, “That little vagabond, Garrick, bit you when he took you in his arms,” canceled his son’s indentures, and let him go.

He made his first appearance, in Dublin, June 19, 1794, as *Lingo* (‘Agreeable Surprise’) and *Jacob* (‘Chapter of Accidents’) at Mrs. Wells’s benefit. His performance was satisfactory, but he was not allowed to repeat it. Walking gentlemen, harlequins, and other distasteful parts were his fate, and he counted himself fortunate if he was able to introduce his imitations, which had early made him popular with the company. His salary of a guinea a week was

often in arrears, vacations were frequent, and at last in despair he sailed for home, resolved to return for good to the shop. But the vessel being driven by bad weather to the coast of Wales, he landed at Swansea, in Oct. 1799. Here he made the acquaintance of the manager of the theatre, and was immediately engaged for leading business. He was, he writes, "successful in pleasing," and remained three years in Wales.

His next engagement was on the Yorkshire circuit, under the management of Tate Wilkinson, to succeed "a Mr. Emery." The eccentric manager billed his new comedian as "from the Theatre Royal, Dublin," not wishing it known that he had "a man from the mountains" in his company; but even this prestige did not bring success at first, and it was a long time before Mathews rose to be "the most popular actor that ever appeared in the Yorkshire Theatres." By 1803 his fame had spread to London, and he was engaged for the summer season at the Haymarket by George Colman, the younger.

He made his first appearance in the metropolis in May, 1803, and soon scored an unequivocal success as *Risk*, in 'Love Laughs at Locksmiths,' the first great original part ever written for him. He at once became a London favorite, and after a second summer at the Haymarket, signed an agreement with Sheridan to act for five years at Drury Lane.

The inconveniences and discouragements he had suffered up to this time were no greater than have been experienced by many others who have struggled unaided from obscurity to fame. But owing to his supersensitive nature, annoyances that most people would have regarded as mere trifles often caused him

intense mental distress. This extreme sensitiveness should always be taken into account in making an estimate of Mathews's character. It made him alive to every peculiarity of appearance and disposition in those he met, which his wonderful power of mimicry and thorough theatrical training enabled him to reproduce with the utmost exactness and effect. His sensitiveness also rendered him often extremely irritable, especially when in later years serious injuries, that rarely left him free from pain, highly accentuated it. But his instant perception of the humorous and his love of fun usually banished his irascibility in short order, and the bright men of his day at once found in him a congenial spirit.

His friendship with the younger Colman and Charles Young began with his first appearance in London and lasted through life. Theodore Hook, then in the most brilliant part of his career, was his close friend ; and Sheridan, though past his prime, used to delight in sending Mathews notes, putting him up to jokes that he himself no longer cared to play, but was just as ready to enjoy. Many stories are told of Mathews's amusing experiences at this period ; his wife has printed a great number of them with much circumstantiality of detail in her admirable 'Life' of her husband, evidently just as she used to hear them from his lips ; but they are mostly stories to be told rather than read, and lost their chief charm with their narrator. The most characteristic are those of his assumptions of the character of *Mr. Pennyman*, an imaginary individual in whose person he was wont unexpectedly to appear and annoy his friends in and out of the theatre with his persistent and undesired attentions. He would gain admission to various

places—the greenroom of the theatre, or a friend's house, for instance—in his proper person, and then, by simply changing his countenance, voice and manner without any aid from make-up or costume, he would entirely deceive even his intimates who were not in the secret.

At the burning of the Drury Lane Theatre in 1809, Mathews emigrated with the rest of the company to the Lyceum, and in Oct. 1812, he went to Covent Garden to fill the position he had vainly sought twenty-two years before.

In July, 1814, while playing a summer engagement at the Haymarket, he was thrown from his tilbury and received injuries to his hip from which he never recovered. But as soon as he was able to move about, he was at the theatre again, playing a lame man in 'Love and Gout,' and hobbling through other parts with a cane.

This exhibition of infirmity was so distasteful to Mathews, and continued exertion was so painful even after he could walk without assistance, that he gave his attention more and more to his table entertainments, which, "with the occasional assistance of Mrs. Mathews in the vocal department," had been a successful venture in the provinces as early as 1808; though it was not until 1818 that he appeared in London—at the English Opera House—as the sole performer, in one of his 'At Homes.' These consisted generally of a table entertainment, in which Mathews in a lively monologue of anecdote and jest, pointed with songs, carried his audience with him through a series of amusing adventures, which he illustrated with imitations of all the queer people he encountered, followed by a farce,

every character of which he himself assumed, making quick changes and aided by his skill in ventriloquy.

It is by these ‘At Homes,’ which became a popular feature of every London season, that Mathews is best known. But he always wished to be ranked as an actor ; and that as an actor he stood in the front rank of his profession, is freely acknowledged. It was due to his suggestion and efforts that the great farewell dinner was given to his idol, John Kemble ; and he always made it a point to attend the annual dinners of the Theatrical Fund, though as a rule, he obstinately avoided all like public occasions. Patmore, in his ‘Personal Recollections,’ calls him “the greatest dramatic artist of the day in his line;” and Charles Dickens, when at one period he seriously contemplated going on the stage, went to the theatre every night for three years, “and always,” he writes, “to see Mathews when he played.”

Mathews hated above all to be known as a mimic,—a person who, he held, merely exaggerates salient points ; while an imitator, by closely studying and then reproducing each characteristic of thought and expression as well as of appearance, actually becomes, to all intents, the subject of his impersonation, and seeks effects, not by exaggerating peculiarities, but by assuming conditions which will exhibit them in a grotesque or humorous light. No doubt his sense of the ludicrous and the desire to start a laugh often induced Mathews to indulge in the lower form of art, but it was as an imitator that he excelled. Coleridge once said, “ You call him a mimic. I define him as a comic poet acting his own poems.”

Always a careful student of human nature, Mathews

was continually going out of his way to study odd types that he met. He was especially fond of attending trials and listening to the Parliamentary debates. He enjoyed, too, having queer people about him, and his personal servants were more apt to be distinguished for their erratic traits than for any special aptitude as attendants. He had a great affection for the celebrated dwarf, Count Boruwlaski, who was a frequent visitor at his house. Indeed all human curiosities, or "freaks" in the language of the show, had an irresistible attraction for him. Even the mere fact that a man was a foreigner seemed to endear him to Mathews. He was quick to sympathize with children, and would often join in their games, adapting his tone and manner so successfully to their standard, that they would at once unhesitatingly accept their new mate on terms of perfect equality. His wife once found him disputing with some boys on the street about some marbles he accused one of them of having won from him by cheating, and all seemed perfectly oblivious of anything extraordinary in the occurrence. The same gentleness of disposition that enabled him to associate so readily with children, showed itself also in his fondness for animals. In human society he was apt to be extremely and absurdly irritable, for which his wife accounts by saying that "He felt so acutely every absence of propriety and tact in natures coarser than his own, that he lacked presence of mind to hide the immediate effect of such discoveries." And in times of pain and trouble he often spent hours with the animals at the Zoological Gardens, where he found companions presumably of more tact than among his fellow men.

Instances of his irritability are innumerable. The oft-told story of his slapping down the pot of mustard before a total stranger who declined to eat it on his boiled beef, and leaving the coffee-room of the inn in disgust because of the stranger's continued refusal is eminently characteristic of him whether it is true or not. Nothing was more sure to annoy him than to be asked to perform in private, to "tumble" as he expressed it, when he had been invited to some purely social entertainment. Yet when approached with skill, and among friends, he was quick to meet a wish to enjoy his powers. The Duke of Richmond, who was very partial to Mathews, was wont to propose his health after dinner and call upon him as Lord Ellenborough, Lord Erskine, or perhaps as Sheridan or Curran, to respond. Mathews would immediately rise and, without a moment's hesitation or previous preparation, make a speech perhaps of half an hour, in the character of the person named, reproducing not only the countenance, voice and gesticulation of whoever he represented, but the individuality of thought and style of speech as well. According to Lady Blessington, Sir Walter Scott, who was his strong personal friend and whom he greatly admired, assured Lord Byron, whom Mathews also knew, that his Curran was "not an imitation, it was a continuation of the man." This faculty of putting on another man's thoughts with his clothes, so to speak, was quickly appreciated by playwrights and managers; and in most of the plays that were written for him his parts were simply indicated in skeleton, and left for him to elaborate *ad libitum*.

Ready as Mathews was to speak on any subject,

or carry a joke to any length when he had assumed the personality of another, in his own private character he was the very reverse. He shunned observation and notoriety, and was made miserable at the mere thought of participating in any public function. The very sight of a crowd made him nervous, except when the footlights intervened. In fact probably no more incongruous and contradictory man has ever lived. He could never understand any person's feeling hurt at being imitated by him, yet he was thrown into a furious rage when he himself was taken off by Yates, his intimate friend, who had been his manager in his first trip to France in 1817, and with whom he was associated in the management of the Adelphi from 1828 until he died. Although at ease with those he felt to be his friends, among whom were some of the most noted people of his day, including George the Fourth, who always "commanded" a private performance of each new '*At Home*,' at Windsor, yet in the presence of trades-people and servants he was embarrassed and diffident.

The sight of a picture hung awry would put him into a fidget, yet his usual mode of making memoranda was by some disarrangement of the furniture—a soiled stocking in the middle of the floor would remind him to take a clean pair to the theatre—and he would fly into a passion if in such cases any one attempted to place things in order.

He hated to handle money, or have it about his person, and he constantly found himself without a penny in his pocket, and very awkwardly placed. Yet no one better appreciated money for what it would buy; and he made a great deal, which he was continually

losing in unfortunate investments, in speculation, and in loans to those who too easily gained his confidence or his sympathy. In 1818 he signed a six years' engagement with S. J. Arnold, which was so disadvantageous to him, that when his wife showed him how he had virtually sold himself for a mess of pottage, he nearly died ; and Arnold was compelled to amend the terms of the agreement for fear of fatal consequences.

In the hopes of bettering his fortunes Mathews twice visited America. The first trip was taken in the autumn of 1822, and his letters to Mrs. Mathews, describing American manners and customs, are very interesting, especially in his unconscious efforts to adjust his impressions to his preconceived notions of what he was going to see. He arrived in the midst of a cholera epidemic, and sought refuge in Hoboken, "a most romantic and beautiful village," which he declares to be "four miles across an arm of the sea from New York." He made his first appearance in America at Baltimore, Sept. 23, in 'A Trip to Paris,' one of his 'At Homes.' He writes of its reception : "They roared and screeched as if they had never heard anything comical before. . . . Most people supposed I should find them dull ; and so they are in private, I suppose—*tarnation* heavy and grave—but not so in the theatre. The neatest and best points were never better appreciated, even in London." As a rule, however, the Americans preferred his acting to his 'At Homes.'

He received much attention everywhere. "Generals, judges, commodores (admirals here)," he writes, "bar-
risters and merchants, have left their cards for me. Judge Irving, a brother of Washington Irving, called

and introduced himself." He was much annoyed, however, by the independence and impudence of those whom he regarded as his social inferiors—the same traits, according to his own accounts, which he found so amusing in the common people in Ireland. As a proof of his popularity in New York he sent the following advertisement from a daily paper to Mrs. Mathews : "The proprietors of the Brooklyn boat inform the public, that the steam vessels 'Fulton' and 'Active' will, on the occasion of Mr. Mathews' benefit, start from Brooklyn at half-past five, and remain to carry the passengers back after the play." He was well received by the Bostonians, who, he writes, "have given themselves a name as critics ; and it is said by themselves, that this is more like an English town than any in America,—more literary people, better polished, and larger cities look up much to their opinion." Indeed, so great was the demand to see him that an essentially American product (probably imported from New York) appeared in the English-like town. He says in a letter : "On great occasions (of which only four have occurred—Cooke, Phillips, Kean and myself), people speculate in buying up tickets. It is mobbing work to purchase them."

But in spite of his artistic successes, his journey was a financial failure. The time lost at the beginning of the season through fear of the cholera disturbed his plans, and he was often distressed, and delayed by the long distances he had to travel, and by the severe winter ; while the large payments he had to make Arnold to recompense him for the loss of his London season absorbed all his profits. On

a wager with Price, his manager, he performed *Othello* in New York before sailing in May, and won great applause by it. He was compelled to repeat it several times there ; and on his return, in Liverpool, as well.

He was induced in 1824 by his financial embarrassments to place his theatrical portrait gallery, which had been his pet hobby for years, at public exhibition. It contained four hundred pictures, which, while not all of the first rank artistically, formed a unique illustration of the most brilliant period of England's histrionic history.

In 1834 he revisited America, but he was already a broken-down man. His infirmities, due to the effects of severe injuries, had made the performance with which he delighted others a source of exquisite pain to himself. On arriving in New York, he was dismayed to learn that there was a strong public sentiment against him owing to statements that he had grossly maligned his American friends in the 'At Home,' which grew out of his previous visit. Mathews, however, silenced his calumniators by reproducing in America the entertainment exactly as it had been given in England. Ill-health, however, kept him idle much of the time ; he again suffered greatly from an exceptionally hard winter ; and he returned home in the spring to die. His last appearance on the stage was made Feb. 11, 1835, in New York as *Coddle* in 'Married Life,' and in one of his table entertainments entitled 'Lone House.' His last appearance in England was at Richmond, previous to his departure for America, and on the very stage whereon his first essay in public had been made in 1793. He died early on the morning of June 28, 1835, his fifty-ninth birthday.

His second wife, whom he had married in 1803, and his only son, Charles James Mathews, survived him. Julian Charles Young, in his 'Memoir' of his father, Charles Mayne Young,—both dear friends of Mathews,—says of him : "The intrinsic worth of his character, the purity of his life, his liberality to the necessitous, his simplicity, his untarnished integrity, his love for his wife and son, his fidelity to his friends, his loyalty to his patrons, his chivalrous defence of those he thought unjustly defamed, could not fail to win for him the thorough respect of all who knew him. On the other hand, genius and gentleman as he was, his nervous whimsicality, his irritability about trifles, his antipathies to particular people, places and objects, rendered him justly vulnerable to ridicule and censure."

HENRY GALLUP PAINÉ.

Oct. 18, 1883.—"E'en from my boyhood up" I knew old Charles Mathews, the comedian, intimately. The present generation has too often heard of him, and therefore naturally thinks of him as a great *mimic*. I claim for him higher pretensions—viz., that of being the most wonderful *imitator* of his age.

He certainly was unique in his way, and full of incongruities. I never knew any man so alive to the eccentricities of others, who was so dead to his own. I never knew a man who made the world laugh so much, who laughed so seldom himself. I never knew a man who, when *in* society, could make the dullest merry, so melancholy *out* of it. On the other hand, I never knew a man so prompt to resent calumnious

imputations on others, or so ready to forgive those who had done himself wrong. In his imitation of others, he was never actuated by malevolence ; but no man was more hasty in attributing unamiable motives to any who made *him* the subject of mimicry. He was very fond of imitating Dignum the singer, and used to tell how, when he took him off to his face, he would say, "Oh, Mathews ! you are a wonderful person ; but it is wicked, it really is, to mock natur—you should not do it, 'pon my life." And yet he himself was furious with Yates for taking the like liberty with him. . . .

I have seen him scratch his head, and grind his teeth, and assume a look of anguish, when a haunch of venison has been carved unskilfully in his presence. I have seen him, though in high feather and high talk when in a sunny chamber, if transferred to a badly-lighted room, withdraw in a corner and sit by himself in moody silence. He was strangely impressionable by externals. I have known him refuse permission to a royal Duke to see over his picture-gallery on Highgate Hill, because the day of his call was cloudy. He was such a passionate lover of sunshine, that I have seen him "put out," for a whole day by the lady of a house at which he was calling pulling down the Venetian blinds. "There are not many days in the year," he would say, "when the sun shines at all in this country ; and when he *is* disposed to be kindly and to pay us a visit, down goes every blind in his face, to show him, I suppose, how little we value his presence." Whenever he went out to dinner, in the good old days when moderator and sinumbra lamps were unknown, and wax-candles were

in fashion, he was wont to carry in his breast-pocket a pair of small silver snuffers, so that, when the wicks were long and dull, he might be able to snuff them, and thus brighten up the gloom that was gathering round the table. I have known him, without the slightest cause, appropriate remarks to himself which were intended for others, and fret his heart-strings over imaginary wrongs for hours. I have known him frenzied with rage, on discovering that a tidy house-maid had picked up from the floor of his bedroom a dirty pair of stockings which he had left there "as a memorandum," on the same principle on which people tie knots in their handkerchiefs. And yet, with all these unhappy infirmities, I never knew a man more formed to inspire, and who succeeded more in inspiring personal affection, or who, though exposed to many temptations, was so unsullied by them.

I have already implied, if I have not asserted, that he was liable to alternate fits of elation and depression. At one time he was so alarmed about himself, that he begged his razors might be always kept by his man, and never left in his room, lest, under some malignant impulse, he might destroy himself. When the black cloud was on his spirit, he was taciturn ; and if addressed, laconic and sour in his replies. At such times he would speak as if he were a fatalist ; he would vow that nothing ever went right with him ; that he was the most ill-starred of men ; and then, in confirmation of his assertion, would say—"I never, in my life, put on a new hat, that it did not rain and ruin it. I never went out in a shabby coat because it was raining, and thought all, who had the choice, would keep indoors, that the sun did not burst forth

in its strength, and bring out with it all the butterflies of fashion whom I knew, or who knew me. I never consented to accept a part I hated, out of kindness to an author, that I did not get hissed by the public and cut by the writer. I could not take a drive of a few minutes with Terry, without being overturned, and having my hip-bone broke, though my friend got off unharmed."

JULIAN CHARLES YOUNG : 'Journal.'

Mathews has really all the will, as well as all the talent, to be amusing. He confirms my idea of ventriloquism (which is an absurd word), as being merely the art of imitating sounds at a greater or less distance, assisted by some little points of trick to influence the imagination of the audience.

SIR WALTER SCOTT : Diary, Jan. 12, 1826, quoted in Lockhart's 'Life of Scott,' vol. ii., chap. 30.

Look at the countenance of a man who by accident meets a comic actor. The muscles of his face relax, a glow steals over him ; he is full of expectation ; and many a poor joke has passed for wit of the first water, because it fell from a mouth wont to pour forth matter rich in fun, frolic and hilarity. I never was so struck with the truth of the latter part of this observation, as when chance, some time since, threw in my way a letter from the late lamented Charles Mathews to a gentleman with whom he had been on a visit. It appeared as if he thought himself obliged to pay his friend for his hospitality in jokes, and that it was expected that he, Charles Mathews, could neither write nor think but as a comedian. Oh, it was most

dreary wit! such bitter throes and such diminutive births.

W.M. ROBSON: the 'Old Playgoer.' Letter 1.

You say I have spoken not well of Mathews; but there you wrong me, Charles: I only put forth a protest against false and forced wit, and cited a letter of Mathews as an instance of it. As an *actor* there were few I liked better than Mathews; but when he sank into an *imitator* of actors I closed my account with him. He was, there is no doubt, exceedingly amusing; but that kind of amusement not jumping with my humor I never sought it. . . . No one admired Charles Mathews more than I did (I preferred his *Mawworm* to that of Liston,) while he was engaged, and worthily in very legitimate drama; but when he sank, for the sake of gain, or for the applause of ill-excited laughter, to a mimic and a teller of stories I went not near him.

Ibid. Letter 6.

Mathews's arrival in New York, occurred in September, 1822; the yellow fever was prevailing. I received a kind note from that benevolent man, Simpson the manager of the Park Theatre, to hasten on board a ship off the harbor, in which was Mr. Mathews, in mental distress at the prospect of landing. The phenomena exhibited by his nervous temperament were most striking; he had been informed that one hundred and forty deaths had occurred on that day. Though some three miles off the Battery, he felt, he affirmed, the pestilential air of the city; every cloud came to him surcharged with mortality; every wave

imparted from the deep, exhalations of destruction. He walked the deck, tottering, and in the extremest agitation. He refused to land at the city, and insisted upon finding shelter in some remote place. Hoboken was decided upon, and thither Mr. Simpson and myself accompanied him. Some two miles from the Jersey shore, on the road towards Hackensack, Mr. Simpson found lodgings for him in a rural retreat occupied by a gardener. Here Mathews passed the night walking to and fro in his limited apartment, ruminating on his probable departure within a few hours to the world of spirits.

DR. FRANCIS : 'Old New York,' pp. 240-1.

A more nervous, irritable, fretful creature never trod the stage. Inattention, or loud talking by the audience, would, at any time, overthrow his best exertions, and render him not only uncomfortable, but really unhappy. . . . In derision, it has been said, he was after all *only* a mimic. Now, what does acting consist of but the power of mimicry? The rapid changes of face, of voice, of manner, which Mathews possessed in a pre-eminent degree, are the very claims of a comic actor to public favor, without which he can never hope to succeed. Then shame upon such slander, which had its origin in professional pique. Mr. Mathews was one of the best comedians belonging to the British stage, gainsay it who may.

F. C. WEMYSS : 'Twenty-six Years of the Life of an Actor,' pp. 82-3.

He was really an amiable, good-hearted man ; but his nervous irritability — commenced no doubt in

affectation and terminated in disease—rendered him extremely objectionable to those who were not inclined either to submit to or laugh at his prejudices ; and his uncontrolled expressions of disgust at everything American would have speedily ended his career, but that Price managed to have him continually surrounded by a certain set, who had the good sense enough to admit his talent as ample amends for his rudeness. He actually came to rehearsal with his nose stopped with cotton to prevent his smelling the “the d— American chops.” Who could even laugh at such folly ? It was positively necessary to his health and happiness to have some fresh annoyance every day. . . . At his last engagement that season [1823] his attraction decreasing Price cajoled him with playing *Othello*, which drew a full house ; and he was actually foolish enough to believe he could play it—not in imitation, but in the manner of John Kemble ! But no matter whose manner it was intended to convey, he made the *Moor* the most melancholy limping negro I ever beheld. The audience were exactly of my way of thinking ; and but for the high favor he had gained they would have smothered him long before he smothered *Desdemona*.

JOE COWELL : ‘Thirty Years Among the Players,’
part ii., chap. 3.

The entertainment consisted of a narrative (for the greater part) of a journey in a mail coach, which gave occasion to songs, imitations, etc. The most pleasant representation was of a Frenchman. His broken English was very happy. And Mathews had caught the mind as well as the words of Monsieur. His

imitation of French tragedians was also very happy. Talma was admirably exhibited. . . . Mathews was not without humor in his imitations of a French valet, attending his invalid master in bed ; and his occasional bursts as master, and as the invisible cook and butler were pleasant. He took a child, *i.e.*, a doll, out of a box, and held a droll dialogue. The best dramatic exhibition was a narrative of an old Scotchwoman. He put on a hood and tippet, screwed his mouth into a womanly shape, and, as if by magic, became another creature. It was really a treat.

HENRY CRABB ROBINSON : 'Reminiscences,' vol. i., chap. 21, April 23, 1818.

Mathews was a genius in mimicry, a fac-simile in mind as well as manner ; and he was a capital *Sir Fretful Plagiary*. It was a sight to see him looking wretchedly happy at his victimizers, and digging deeper and deeper with his mortification at every fresh button of his coat that he buttoned up.

LEIGH HUNT : 'Autobiography,' vol. i., chap. 6.

The old age of Mr. Mathews is, like the rest of his excellencies, perfectly unaffected and correct ; the appearance of years he manages so well, that many of his admirers who have never seen him off the stage, insist that he is an elderly man, and the reason of this deception is evident : most of our comedians in their representation of age either make no alteration of their voice, and like antiquarian cheats palm a walking-stick or a hat upon us for something very ancient, or sink into so unnatural an imbecility that they are apt, on occasion, to forget their tottering knees, and

bent shoulders, and like Vertumnus in the poet, are old and young in the turn of a minute. Mathews never appears to wish to be old ; time seems to have come to him not he to time, and as he never when he can avoid it, makes that show of feebleness which the vanity of age always would avoid, so he never forgets that general appearance of years, which the natural feebleness of age could not help.

LEIGH HUNT : 'Critical Essays,' London 1807, pp. 137-8.

On the first night of one of his "At Homes," when the theatre was packed to the very ceiling, and all his best friends and supporters were there to support him, I witnessed a singular instance of his sensibility to the opinion of others. At the end of the first part of the entertainment, Manners Sutton, the Speaker (afterwards Lord Canterbury), Theodore Hook, Gen. Phipps, and others, went behind the scenes to congratulate him, and assure him that, as far as the piece had proceeded, it was an indubitable success. He accepted their compliments rather ungraciously. All they said, to buoy him up, only seemed the more to depress him. At first they could not make him out, till he explained himself by blurting forth the truth. "It is all very well, and very kind of you, who wish me well, to tell me the piece is going well ; *I* know better. It ain't 'going well,' and it can't be 'going well'—it must be hanging fire, or that man with the bald head in the pit, in the front row, could not have been asleep the whole time I have been trying to amuse him ! " "Oh," said the Speaker, "perhaps he is drunk." "No, no ! he ain't ; I've tried hard to

'lay that flattering unction to my soul,' but it won't do. I've watched the fellow, and when he opens his eyes, which he does now and then, he looks as sober as a judge, and as severe as one; and then he deliberately closes them, as if he disliked the very sight of me. I tell you, all the laughter and applause of the whole house—boxes, pit, and gallery put together—weigh not a feather with me while that 'pump' remains dead to my efforts to arouse him." The call bell rang; all his friends returned to their seats in front, and he to the stage. The second part opened with one of the rapid songs, in the composition of which James Smith, the author, excelled so much, and in the delivery of which no one ever equalled Mathews, except his son, who, in that respect, surpasses him. All the time he was singing it, as he paced from the right wing to the left, one saw his head jerking from side to side, as he moved either way, his eyes always directed to one spot, till, at the end of one of the stanzas, forgetful of the audience, and transported out of himself by the obstinate insensibility of the bald-pate, he fixed his eyes on him, as if he were mesmerizing him, and, leaning over the lamps, in the very loudest key, shouted at him "Bo!" The man, startled, woke up, and observing that the singer looked *at* him, sang *to* him, and never took his eyes off him, he became flattered by the personal notice, began to listen, and then to laugh—and laugh, at last, most heartily. From that instant, the actor's spirits rose, for he felt he had converted a stolid country bumpkin into an appreciative listener. After such a triumph, he went home, satisfied that his entertainment had been a complete success.

Mathews had often told Charles Kemble of the great amusement his manservant's peculiarities afforded him, but Kemble said he had never been able to discover anything in him but crass stupidity. "Ah," said Mathews, "you can't conceive what a luxury it is to have a man under the same roof with you who will believe anything you tell him, however impossible it may be."

One warm summer's day, Mathews had a dinner party at Highgate. There were present, among others, Broderip, Theodore Hook, General Phipps, Manners Sutton (then Speaker of the House of Commons), and Charles Kemble. The servant had learned by this time the name of the Persian ambassador. Dessert was laid out on the lawn. Mathews, without hinting his intention, rang the bell in the dining-room, and on its being answered, told the man to follow him to the stables while he gave the coachman certain directions in his presence. The instant Mathews reached the stable door, he called to the coachman (who he knew was not there), looked in, and, before the manservant could come up, started back, and, in a voice of horror, cried out, "Good heavens! go back, go back—and tell Mr. Kemble that his horse has cut his throat!"

The simple goose, infected by his master's well-feigned panic, and never pausing to reflect on the absurdity of the thing, burst on to the lawn, and, with cheeks blanched with terror, roared out, "Mr. Kemble, sir, you're wanted directly." Seeing Mr. Kemble in no hurry to move, he repeated his appeal with increased emphasis, "For heaven's sake, sir, come; your poor horse has cut his throat!"

JULIAN CHARLES YOUNG: 'Journal,' *chap.* 8.

I remember the Elder Mathews, a wizen, dark man, with one high shoulder, a distorted mouth, a lame leg, and an irritable manner. He took little notice of me save on one occasion, when a pet little black dog which always accompanied him, sprang up and bit me on the cheek, and then nothing could exceed his remorseful interest.

EDMUND YATES : ‘Memoirs of a Man of the World,’
chap. 1.

I finished the ‘Life of Mathews.’ It is a strange book, too much of it, but highly interesting. A singular man ; certainly the greatest actor that I ever saw, far greater than Munden, Dowton, Liston or Fawcett ; far greater than Kean, though there it is not so easy to make a comparison. I can hardly believe Garrick to have had more of the genuine mimetic genius than Mathews. I often regret that I did not see him more frequently. Why did I not ? I cannot tell ; for I admired him, and laughed my sides sore whenever I saw him.

LORD MACAULAY : Diary, Jan. 10, 1851, quoted in
‘Life and Letters,’ *chap. 12.*

CHARLES KEMBLE.

1775—1854.

Farewell ! all good wishes go with him to-day,
Rich in name, rich in fame, he has play'd out the play.
Though the sock and the buskin for aye be removed
Still he serves in the train of the drama he loved.
We now who surround him, would make some amends
For past years of enjoyment—we court him as friends,
Our chief nobly born, genius crown'd, our zeal shares,
O, his coronet's hid by the laurel he wears.

Shall we never again see his spirit infuse
Life, life in the gay gallant forms of the Muse,
Through the lovers and heroes of Shakspere he ran,
All the soul of a soldier, the heart of the man—
Shall we never in Cyprus his spirit retrace,
See him stroll into Angiers with indolent grace,
Or greet him in bonnet at fair Dunsinane—
Or meet him in moonlit Verona again.

Let the curtain come down. Let the scene pass away—
There's an autumn when summer has squandered her
day ;
We sit by the fire, when we can't by the lamp,
And re-people the banquet, re-soldier the camp.
O, nothing can rob us of memory's gold ;
And though he quit the gorgeous, and we may grow
old,
With our Shakspere on hand, and bright forms in our
brains,
We can dream up our Siddons and Kembles again.

JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS.



CHARLES KEMBLE
As Romeo.

CHARLES KEMBLE.

Charles Kemble was the eleventh child of Roger Kemble and of Sarah Ward, his wife, whose eldest daughter was Mrs. Siddons and whose eldest son was John Philip Kemble. He was born at Brecon, in South Wales, Nov. 27, 1775. Like his eldest brother he was educated at the English College at Douay. He received an appointment in the post-office, but he did not keep it long, for in 1792, he made his first appearance on the stage, at Sheffield, as *Orlando* in 'As You Like It.' When the new Drury Lane Theatre was opened, he was first seen in London as an actor, performing *Malcolm* to the *Lady Macbeth* of Mrs. Siddons, and the *Macbeth* of John Kemble. Then, and indeed as long as his brother and sister remained on the stage, Charles Kemble was overshadowed, and had perforce to content himself with a second place. In time he made this second place his own, and raised it until it was but little behind the first. As the awkwardness of his rough beginnings wore away, as he gained power over himself from practice, and authority with the public from experience, his position became more assured and his skill more abundantly recognized. His *Laertes*, his *Cassio*, his *Falconbridge*, his *Macduff*, his *Edgar*, his *Jaffier* came in time to have no rivals, and to hold their own, as far

as might be, against almost any other actor's *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King John*, *Macbeth*, *Lear* or *Pierre*. He was the most gifted and graceful of *Romeos* since the rivalry of Garrick and Barry. He left Drury Lane and went to Covent Garden in 1803, with the other members of the family, when John Kemble bought a share in the theatre ; and there, he acted *Mark Antony* to the *Brutus* of his brother, the *Cassius* of Young, and the *Casca* of Terry. Although John Kemble had a certain humor in private life, it did not find expression on the stage, and Charles Kemble was free to act the chief characters of comedy. John Kemble had made a reserved gentleman of *Charles Surface*, but Charles Kemble soon restored that lively scapegrace to his pristine airiness. As *Young Mirabeï* in the 'Inconstant,' as *Young Marlow* in 'She Stoops to Conquer,' as *Captain Absolute*, as *Mercutio* and as *Benedick*, there was no other actor who came nigh him : his comedy was incomparable ; it had high spirits and high breeding ; it had no trace of either tragedy or clowning ; it was the very embodiment of well-graced wit.

John Kemble gave Charles his interest in Covent Garden Theatre. Unfortunately the affairs of the house became involved in inextricable confusion ; and the disputes of the proprietors, one with another, and of the proprietors with their creditors, gave rise to an interminable chancery-suit. The company at Covent Garden was headed by Edmund Kean, Young, Macready, Charles Kemble and Miss O'Neill ; but the finances of the theatre sank lower and lower. In 1827 Charles Kemble was one of the little band of English actors who crossed the Channel and revealed Shakspeare to the enthusiastic Parisians, and thus

hastened the Romanticist revolt. About the same time the phenomenal success of Weber's 'Freyschutz,' gave Covent Garden an Indian-summer of prosperity. But 'Oberon,' which Weber wrote especially for the theatre, did not gain popular acceptance. In October, 1829, Charles Kemble brought out his daughter, Frances Ann Kemble, as *Juliet*, appearing himself as *Mercutio*, while Mrs. Charles Kemble encouraged her daughter as the *Nurse*. The success of Miss Fanny Kemble was undoubted, and for a while the theatre prospered. To lend weight to his daughter's performances, Charles Kemble assumed the heavier characters of tragedy, *Othello*, *Shylock*, *Macbeth*; in these he showed that he was a master of the art of acting, although he was not as well suited by nature to the performance of these parts, as he was to the performance of *Mercutio*, *Mark Antony* and *Benedick*. His *Hamlet* was the best since John Kemble's.

In 1832 Charles Kemble and his daughter paid a visit to the United States, where his sister, Mrs. Whitelock, had long been highly esteemed. He made his first appearance in New York, at the Park Theatre, Sept. 17, 1832, as *Hamlet*, his daughter making her first appearance the next night, as *Bianca* in 'Fazio,' and both being seen as *Romeo* and *Juliet* on the third night. Mr. Ireland, the historian of the New York stage, records, that "the sensation created by the appearance of Mr. and Miss Kemble had been equalled in kind only in the days of Cooke and Keane, and in duration and intensity was altogether unparalleled." For a year and a half they traveled together through the United States, playing again and again, in the chief cities, with unbroken success. Then, in the

spring of 1834, Mr. Charles Kemble returned to England alone, his daughter remaining in America, as the wife of Mr. Pierce Butler, of Philadelphia. He remained on the stage until December, 1836, returning occasionally to act his chief parts before the Duchess of Kent and her daughter, the young Princess Victoria. His final appearance was in 1840. About this time his second daughter, Adelaide, was brought out in English opera, and made an unqualified success as *Norma*; in 1843 she married Mr. Sartoris after he had withdrawn from the stage. Charles Kemble gave a series of readings from Shakspere: and after the death of George Colman the younger, in 1736, he was appointed Examiner of Plays, an office which he held while he lived. He died in London, Nov. 12, 1854.

“Charles Kemble, who had an ideal face and figure,” Leigh Hunt declares, “was the nearest approach I ever saw to Shakspere’s gentlemen and heroes of romance;” and in these characters he was, by common consent, unsurpassable. His comedy was incomparable. His tragedy—excepting possibly his *Hamlet*—could not be placed on as high a level. ‘To fathom the depths of character, to trace its latent motives, to feel its finest quiverings of emotion, to comprehend the thoughts that are hidden under words, and thus possess one’s self of the actual mind of the individual men,’—this is the duty of the tragedian, so Macready tells us, and this was, in a measure, beyond Charles Kemble’s power to compass. He had not the haziness of expression, which comes from weakness of conception, for his intelligence was high and abundant; it was rather the deficiency of execution, due to physical

incapacity to body forth the character which the mental faculties could portray adequately enough. His voice was weak, for one thing ; and his delivery of verse, although melodious, was monotonous. Toward the end of his life he became very deaf. On the stage, and off, he was at all times a gentleman and a scholar, yet he was without the pedantry of scholarship which John Kemble did not always conceal. Like his brother, and like his son, Charles Kemble, had a gift for philology. He adapted plays from both the French and the German ; but none of them has been quite as long lived as his wife's adaptation, the 'Day after the Wedding.'

BRANDER MATTHEWS.

Mr. Charles Kemble excels in three classes of characters : in the tender lover-like *Romeo*, in the spirited gentleman of tragedy, such as *Laertes* and *Faulconbridge*, and as a very happy mixture of the occasional debauchee and the gentleman of feeling, as in Shakspere's *Cassio*, and *Charles Oakley* in the 'Jealous Wife.' In theatrical lovers, in that complaining softness with which the fancies of young ladies adorn their imaginary heroes, Mr. Charles Kemble is certainly the first performer on the stage.

LEIGH HUNT: 'Critical Essays.' London, 1807,
pp. 223-4.

Some years after Charles Kemble, the *Faulconbridge* and *Mirabel* of his day, had ostensibly retired from the boards whence I imbibed inspiration in my salad days, sitting in the great pit of the comfortable old

Theatre Royal in Covent Garden, a self-sufficient young stager had the temerity to assert at a convivial meeting that “the public wouldn’t stand Charles Kemble if he were to come back ;” on which a tall, popular author rose like a steeple, and bending with stately grace towards the rash youth, said, in his quiet way, “Sir, if you were to go to bed and dream that you saw Charles Kemble as he was in his prime, when you woke in the morning you’d cut your throat.” The matchless *Romeo*, after taking the dying hand of so many *Mercutios*, from the “Starry Lewis” to “Gentleman Jones,” first taught the town how the part should be performed, when his famous daughter Fanny, whose Shakspearean readings shed the radiance of a glorious sunset round the Kemble name, made her *début* as *Juliet*.

As the best *Romeo* proved also to be the best *Mercutio*, the excitement was great regarding his *Pierre*, when he resigned *Jaffier*, on his daughter’s appearance as *Belvidera*. His gallant appearance elicited tumultuous applause ; but, alas ! the light voice, so charming in comedy and exquisite in the description of the *Fairie Queen Mab*, made us miss the thunder of Young, who was great by his absence. These admirable actors were best seen together. In *King John*, Young’s deep tones in the single syllable words “cast — thine — eye — on — yon — young — boy,” sounded like the tolling of a bell for the child’s death. Charles Kemble, as *Faulconbridge*, came into Angiers with the “indolent grace” of a tawny lion emerging from an African jungle, as if the imagination of his mother had been imbued with his royal father’s hand to paw encounter with the king of the forest ; his light chaff

of Austria was kept well within the bounds of high comedy.

WALTER LACY, in the 'Green Room,' Christmas, 1880.

Charles Kemble and his wife performed in engagements not very lucrative, though Kemble's young *Mirabel* in Farquhar's 'Inconstant' was a most finished piece of acting. His tragic efforts were on the contrary laborious failures. In *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Richard III.*, he was Charles Kemble at his heaviest. On the other hand, his *Richmond* was chivalrous and spirited, and his *Cassio* incomparable. He was a first-rate actor in second-rate parts.

W. C. MACREADY : 'Reminiscences,' chap. iv., 1813-4.

I have acted *Ophelia* three times with my father, and each time, in that beautiful scene where his madness and his love gush forth together like a torrent swollen with storms, that bears a thousand blossoms on its troubled waters, I have experienced such deep emotion as hardly to be able to speak. The exquisite tenderness of his voice, the wild compassion and forlorn pity of his looks, bestowing that on others which, above all others, he most needed ; the melancholy restlessness, the bitter self-scorning ; every shadow of expression and intonation was so full of all the mingled anguish that the human heart is capable of enduring ; that my eyes scarce fixed on his ere they filled with tears ; and long before the scene was over, the letters and jewel-cases I was tendering to him were wet with them. The hardness of professed actors and actresses is something amazing ; after this part, I could not but recall the various *Ophelias* I have

seen, and commend them for the astonishing absence of everything like feeling which they exhibited. Oh, it made my heart sore to act it.

FRANCES ANN KEMBLE: 'Journal,' vol. i., Oct. 8, 1832, note.

I watched my father narrowly through his part to-night with great attention and some consequent fatigue, and the conclusion I have come to is this: that though his workmanship may be, and is, far finer *in the hand*, than that of any other artist I ever saw, yet its very minute accuracy and refinement renders it unfit for the frame in which it is exhibited. Now, the great beauty of all my father's performances, but particularly of *Hamlet*, is a wonderful accuracy in the detail of the character which he represents; an accuracy which modulates the emphasis of every word, the nature of every gesture, the expression of every look, and which renders the whole a most laborious and minute study, toilsome in the conception and acquirement, and most toilsome in the execution. I am far from advocating that most imperfect conception and embodying of a part which Kean allows himself: literally acting detached passages alone, and leaving all the others, and the entire character indeed, utterly destitute of unity or the semblance of any consistency whatever. But Kean and my father are immediately each other's antipodes, and in adopting their different styles of acting, it is evident that each has been guided as much by his own physical and intellectual individuality, as by any fixed principle of art. The one, Kean, possesses particular physical qualifications; an eye like an orb of light, a voice

exquisitely touching and melodious in its tenderness, and in the harsh dissonance of vehement passion terribly true ; to these he adds the intellectual ones of vigor, intensity, amazing power of concentrating effect ; these give him an entire mastery over his audience in all striking, sudden, impassioned passages ; in fulfilling which he has contented himself, leaving unheeded what he could not compass—the unity of conception, the refinement of detail, and evenness of execution. My father possesses certain physical defects—a faintness of coloring in the face and eye, a weakness of voice ; and the corresponding intellectual deficiencies—a want of intensity, vigor, and concentrating power; these circumstances have led him (probably unconsciously) to give his attention and study to the finer and more fleeting shades of character, the more graceful and delicate manifestations of feeling, the exquisite variety of all minor parts, the classic keeping of a highly wrought whole ; to all these, polished and refined tastes, an acute sense of the beauty of harmonious proportions, and a native grace, gentleness, and refinement of mind and manner, have been his prompters ; but they cannot inspire those startling and tremendous burst of passion which belong to the highest walks of tragedy, and to which he never gave their fullest expression. I fancy my aunt Siddons united the excellencies of both these styles. But to return to my father's *Hamlet* ; every time I see it, something strikes me afresh in the detail. Nothing in my mind can exceed the exquisite beauty of his last “ Go on—I follow thee ” to the *Ghost*.

Ibid.

At length on Dec. 23, 1836, if my memorandum be correct, was the farewell benefit of Charles Kemble. I saw him on the stage in the morning, when he remarked to me in his usually bland manner, that he hoped he should play better that night than ever. His wish was realized. He did play better than ever I saw him. It was a wonderful performance. The play was ‘*Much Ado About Nothing*;’ who will ever see such another *Benedick*? such another *Romeo*? After the fall of the curtain, while the applause (I need scarcely say of a house crowded to the ceiling) was ringing like a burst of terrific artillery, it speedily rose again, and there stood Kemble, pale but firm, surrounded by not only our company, but by every respectable member of the profession in London. Forrest, the great American tragedian, was there with Bartley and Farley, and many members of the aristocracy whose names I have now forgotten. Charles thanking the public, almost choked with grief, and the actors and audience alike melted into tears. He regretted he said that he had not selected a more serious play for so sad an occasion—it was serious enough as it was—he thanked them for half a century of indulgence bestowed on his poor merits—paused, dried his eyes, made an effort, then proceeded with something about good wishes—paused again, bowed, as he could bow, then down came the curtain to not, I should say, one dry eye in that dense house. I went to him soon after in his dressing-room. I murmured something. He thanked me very, very kindly, pressing my hand most warmly; thanked *me* for God knows what. For, to esteem him as I sincerely and devotedly did, was no merit of mine, but *his*. As he was, before the

public the prince of actors, so he was in private life, the very noblest of men.

EDWARD FITZBALL : 'Thirty-five Years of a Dramatic Author's Life,' vol. ii., pp. 52-4.

Mr. Kemble seemed to my eyes before everything pre-eminently a gentleman ; and this told, as it always must tell, when he enacted ideal characters. There was a natural grace and dignity in his bearing, a courtesy and unstudied deference of manner in approaching and addressing women, whether in private society or on the stage, which I have scarcely seen equalled. Perhaps it was not quite so rare in his day as it is now ! What a lover he must have made ! What a *Romeo* ! What an *Orlando* ! I got glimpses of what these must have been in the readings which Mr. Kemble gave after he left the stage, and which I attended diligently with heart and brain awake to profit by what I had heard. How fine was his *Mercutio* ! What brilliancy, what ease, what spontaneous flow of fancy in the *Queen Mab* speech ! The very start of it was suggestive : "Oh, then, I see *Queen Mab* (with a slight emphasis on the *Mab*) has been with you." How exquisite was the play of it, image rising up after image, one crowding upon another, each new one more fanciful than the last ! "Thou talk'st of nothings," says *Romeo* ; but oh, what nothings ! As picture after picture was brought before you by Mr. Kemble's skill, with the just emphasis thrown on every word, yet all spoken trippingly on the tongue, what objects that one might see or touch could be more real.

LADY MARTIN (HELEN FAUCIT) : 'On Some of Shakspere's Female Characters,' pp. 373-74.

Of Mr. Charles Kemble's good opinion of me I have already spoken. When it was decided that the play should be changed to the 'Hunchback,' he offered to resume his original part of *Sir Thomas Clifford* to support me. Never can I forget his rendering of it. What a high and noble bearing ! What tender respect in his approaches as a lover ! What dignified forbearance and self-respect in his reproof afterwards, and in his deportment as the secretary ! All this made the heroine's part more difficult to act ; for what girl, even the most frivolous, could for a moment have thought of the title or the fortune of such a man in comparison with himself.

Ibid., p. 127.

I do not think I ever met a man more hopelessly deaf. Some of us were sitting one day at the Garrick, when a tremendous thunder-storm broke over the house. It raged with extraordinary fury, one clap exploding with terrific noise immediately above us, like a volley of artillery. We looked round at each other almost in horror ; when Charles Kemble, who was calmly reading, lifted his eyes from his book, and said in his trumpet tone, "I think we are going to have some thunder. I feel it in my knees."

EDMUND YATES : 'Memoirs of a Man of the World,' chap. 9, foot note.

I never saw an actor with more buoyancy of spirit than Charles Kemble ; Lewis had wonderful vivacity, airiness, and sparkle, but he was finicking compared with Charles. Who ever played a drunken gentleman

as he did? His efforts to pick up his hat in *Charles Oakley* were the most laughable, the most ridiculous, the most natural that can be imagined. I have seen him perform the character of *Friar Tuck*, in a dramatic version of Mr. Peacock's 'Maid Marion,' with such an extraordinary abandonment and gusto, that you were forced back to the "jolly greenwood and the forest bramble." He absolutely rollicked through the part, as if he had lived all his life with *Robin* and his men, quaffing fat ale, and devouring venison-pasties. But perhaps his masterpiece in this way was *Cassio*; the insidious creeping of the "devil" upon his senses; the hilarity of intoxication; the tongue cleaving to the roof of the mouth, and the lips glued together; the confusion, the state of *loss of self*, if I may so term it, when he received the rebuke of *Othello*, and the wonderful truthfulness of his getting sober, were beyond description fine, nay real. No drunken scene I ever saw on a stage was comparable to it.

Throughout his career, Charles Kemble reflected the influences of his early discipline. He was in the first place a veracious actor, neither adding to nor falling short of the conceptions of his author. He was moreover a most industrious and painstaking actor, thinking nothing done while aught remained to do; inspired with a high ideal, assiduously striving to reach it, and probably in his own conception—for such are the feelings of every genuine artist—never wholly attaining it. He loved his vocation with all his mind and with all his strength. He was not one of those actors who regard their efforts as taskwork and rejoice when the mask is laid aside. He highly rated his

profession, as one ministrant to the intellect and the heart of man—as at once the mirror and the auxiliary of the poet, the painter and the sculptor. All his opportunities were made subservient to it—his reading, his travels, his observation of man and man's works, of society, of nature, of contemporary actors native and foreign. In all respects the work he had in hand he wrought diligently. He had none of the petty jealousies of his profession. At the zenith of his reputation he would undertake characters which inferior actors would have declined as derogatory to them. He envied no one; he supplanted and impeded no one. For his art he was often jealous—never for himself. He possessed in an eminent degree the love of excellence; but he was no seeker of pre-eminence. Stanch in maintaining his opinions as to the proper scope and import of acting, he was tolerant of opposition; and prompt in discovering and acknowledging merit in others.

WILLIAM BODHAM DONNE: ‘Essays on the Drama,’ London, 1858, pp. 162–3.

In secondary parts he was indeed at all times unsurpassed, and he continued to perform them long after he occupied the foremost station in the ranks of scenic artists. How full of winning grace and good humor was his *Bassanio*, how humorous and true his drunken scene in *Cassio*, how fraught with noble shame after *Othello*'s dismissal of his “officer.” He was the only *Laertes* whom it was endurable to see, in collision with *Hamlet*, the only *Cromwell* worthy of the tears and favor of *Wolsey*.

Ibid., p. 167.

With the single exception of Garrick, Charles Kemble played *well*—we emphasize the word because other actors whom we have seen had been ambitious of variety, and imagined they could assume diversified powers when nature had denied them—the widest range of characters on record. If he had no equal in *Benedick*, neither had he in *Jaffier*; if his *Leon* and *Don Felix* were unsurpassed, so were also his *Edgar* in ‘*Lear*’ and his *Leonatus* in ‘*Cymbeline*.’ He was the most joyous and courteous of *Archers*, *Charles Surfaces*, and *Rangers*. His *Jack Absolute* was the most gallant of Guardsmen; his *Colonel Feignwell* a combination of the best high and the best low comedy, and he successively passed through his various assumptions of the Fop, the Antiquary, the Stock-broker, and the Quaker. In young *Mirabel* again he united the highest comic and tragic powers. In the first four acts he revelled in youth, high spirit, and lusty bachelorhood; in the last his scene with the bravoes and the “Red Burgundy” was for its depth of passion equalled alone by Kean’s agony and death in *Overreach*.

Ibid., p. 169.

THOMAS ABTHORPE COOPER.

1776—1849.

“The king comes here to-night ;” he who could
wring

Our hearts at will, was “every inch a king !”
For when in life’s bright noon the stage he trod,
In majesty and grace, a demi-god,
With form, and mien, and attitude, and air,
Which modern kings might envy in despair ;
When his stern brow and awe-inspiring eye
Bore sign of an imperial majesty ;
Then—in the zenith of his glory—then
He moved a model for the first of men.
The drama was his empire : and his throne
No rival dared dispute—he reigned alone !
“His feet bestrode the Ocean ! his reared arm
Crested the world !” His voice possessed a charm
To love’s, to friendship’s and to classic ears,
Like the sweet music of the tuneful spheres ;
“But when he meant to quail and shake the world”
His accents were “like rattling thunders” hurled !
Or plead, “like angels, trumpet-tongued” to prove
The worth of freedom, and the joys of love.

SAMUEL WOODWORTH.



THOMAS ABTHORPE COOPER
As Pericles.

THOMAS ABTHORPE COOPER.

Thomas Abthorpe Cooper, for many years the most distinguished and favorite resident actor on the American stage, was born at Harrow-on-the-Hill, England, in the year 1776. Descended from a respectable Irish family, his father, Doctor Cooper, was surgeon to the East India Company's Factory, at Bauleah, in Bengal, where he died in 1787, leaving his family from unfortunate investments in destitute circumstances. Becoming the ward and pupil of his relative, the celebrated William Godwin, young Cooper early manifested an inclination for the stage, and with an introduction from his friend Holcroft, the dramatist, he first walked the boards in the lowest supernumerary parts in 1792 at the Edinburgh Theatre, then under the management of Mr. Stephen Kemble. He was at length entrusted with the character of the stripling *Malcolm*, in 'Macbeth,' at Newcastle, which he represented successfully till his last speech which ends the play, where he hesitated and finally broke down, receiving from Mr. Kemble after the curtain fell, his salary, with a dismissal from the company, and the information that he had not one single requisite for an actor.

Somewhat disheartened, he nevertheless persevered in his devotion to the profession, gaining confidence and ease in every variety of character in different

country theatres, until at length in the fall of 1795, he had become sufficiently accomplished to secure the privilege of an appearance at Covent Garden, London, as *Hamlet*, soon after followed by *Macbeth*, and *Lothario* in the ‘Fair Penitent,’ being received in the two former characters with the warmest approbation. He was not considered, however, by Mr. Harris, the manager, as having sufficient experience to be entrusted with the entire range of leading tragic heroes, and declining an engagement for secondary characters, he betook himself once more to the provinces, where in 1796, he received an offer from Mr. Wignell of the Philadelphia Theatre, which induced him to cross the Atlantic. He made his first appearance in America at that theatre in the character of *Macbeth*, on Dec. 9, 1796. The first line in tragedy was pre-occupied in Philadelphia by Mr. Fennell, who had likewise pre-occupied the favor of the public, so that Cooper’s performances excited little enthusiasm, and his benefit night was on the point of proving a failure, when he bethought of an elephant that had just arrived, which he engaged for the occasion, and its appearance on the stage procured for him an overflowing house. Mr. Wignell brought his company to New York in the ensuing summer, and there at a temporary theatre in Greenwich Street, Mr. Cooper made his *début* in that city as *Pierre* in ‘Venice Preserved,’ on Aug. 23, 1797, with very great success. Leaving the Philadelphia company he soon after joined the regular theatrical corps of New York then playing in the venerable John Street house, where he first appeared on Jan. 5, 1798, as *Pierre*, followed on Feb. 28 by his appearance at the then new Park Theatre, as *Hamlet*, which, as Mr.

Dunlap the manager observed, had never before been so well played in America.

Here he continued to be enthusiastically received, his only rival being Hodgkinson, who though possessed of more versatility could not approach him in the principal characters of tragedy. His success was now fully established, and he soon became the paramount favorite in all American cities, a position he maintained for a full quarter of a century. His fame reached back to his native land, and in 1803 he was invited to London, and appeared at Drury Lane as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Richard III.*, and *Othello*, but did not secure a permanent engagement. Warmly received on his return, he thenceforward became the great American Star, the visits of George Frederick Cooke in 1810, and Edmund Kean in 1820, depriving him in public estimation of only two or three characters. About 1825-6, his attractiveness became sensibly diminished by the introduction of Italian Opera and the appearance of Booth, Macready and other eminent artists, so that in 1827 he once more tried his luck at Drury Lane, as *Macbeth*, in which character he was so ungraciously received that he did not venture on a second appearance. His return to America was of a triumphal character in every city that he played, and his benefit at the Park Theatre, New York, amounted to eighteen hundred dollars, a receipt at that time almost unprecedented. Thenceforward he steadily lost ground in popularity, and in 1833 the extravagant hospitality of his style of living having dissipated an accumulated fortune of two hundred thousand dollars, and his professional income being seriously reduced, his friends in various cities

exerted themselves to get up for him grand complimentary benefits, the one in New York yielding a receipt of forty-five hundred dollars, far surpassing in amount any previously received on a similar occasion. Mr. Cooper continued on the stage a few years longer, but he had then become the superfluous lagging veteran, and he was ultimately glad to accept a position in the United States Custom House from President Tyler, whose son Robert had married one of Cooper's beautiful daughters, a lady who while the President remained a widower, presided with grace and dignity at the White House in Washington.

Mr. Cooper's first wife, formerly Mrs. Upton, a daughter of David Johnson, Esq., of New York, died in 1808; and by his marriage in 1812 with the most beautiful and brilliant belle of that city, Miss Mary Fairlie, daughter of the celebrated wit, Major James Fairlie, and grand-daughter of Chief Justice Robert Yates, he became allied to some of the most eminent families of the State, and his society was eagerly courted by all who made pretensions to taste or fashion. A numerous family graced the latter union, and a most tender and devoted attachment on his part to his children received from them the warmest reciprocation.

Mr. Cooper's requisites for the profession were a handsome face, full of the most varied expression, a noble person, a fine mellow voice of wonderful capacity of modulation, unusual dignity of manner and grace of action, and a most forcible and eloquent style of declamation, which in such speeches as *Marc Antony's* on the death of *Cæsar*, was in his day unapproached. His manner was not sufficiently light and airy for many characters of comedy, yet he played

Charles Surface, *Duke Aranza* and *Petruchio* with great acceptance ; and his *Leon*, in ‘Rule a Wife and Have a Wife,’ was considered perfection. His style was founded on that of John Philip Kemble, but he was not a servile copyist. In his prime he was considered in America unsurpassed in any Shakspearean character save by Cooke in *Richard*, and by Kean in *Shylock*; and Washington Irving in 1815 wrote from London that he had not there seen his equal in *Macbeth*. In his later years *Damon* and *Virginius* were his best personations, the former character he created in America, and it has served as a model for every subsequent performer. His list of parts included nearly every tragic character known to the stage, his last studied part being that of *Master Walter*, in Knowles’s play of the ‘Hunchback.’

Mr. Cooper died at the residence of his daughter, Mrs. Robert Tyler, at Bristol, Pennsylvania, on April 21, 1849, nearly 73 years of age.

JOSEPH NORTON IRELAND.

His mother going to Holland when he was between eight and nine years of age, the celebrated William Godwin, a friend of the deceased father, prevailed upon her to leave the boy with him, and was to him a father. We have noticed that at the time of his arrival [1796], and first visit to the John Street Theatre, he called himself in conversation the son of Godwin; “much more than a common father is he to me ; he has cherished and instructed me.” Mr. Godwin was his preceptor, his monitor, his friend. He instructed

him, as he could receive the instruction, in French, Latin, Italian and Greek. He regularly read to him every day after dinner. Among the books thus read and explained were ‘Clarissa Harlowe,’ and all Shakspere’s plays. It was customary for Mr. Godwin to dine every Sunday with his friend Holcroft, and Tom always went with him. Thus he lived with one of the most pure and benevolent of men until he was sixteen years of age.

WILLIAM DUNLAP: ‘History of the American Theatre,’ chap. 15.

This gentleman has performed at Drury Lane *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *Richard III*. . . . Mr. Cooper has noble requisites for the profession. He has a very fine person, a voice of astonishing capacity, and a sound judgment. In each of the characters above-mentioned he displayed great ability, and exhibited some originality of manner. The dagger scene of *Macbeth*, and the scene subsequent to the murder, were performed in a most masterly style. This we single out as his best achievement. He did many other things so well as to merit distinguished notice. . . . On the whole, he is a valuable actor; his faults are easily to be corrected; and if he intends to remain in England he will no doubt become a favorite with the public.

Monthly Mirror, London, March, 1803.

Where, where is young Cooper, that Tyro so vain,
Who *Hamlet* re-kills, who’s so often been slain?
But my memory urges, he’ll vex us no more,
As he’s sought with a troop the trans-atlantic shore:

Since our mummers believe, like some wine (what a notion !)

They'll be no more in request by their crossing the ocean ?

JOHN WILLIAMS ("Anthony Pasquin") : the 'Children of Thespis,' (*Ed.* of 1792).

In fact, in certain characters, such as may be classed with *Macbeth*, I do not think that Cooper has his equal in England. . . . I shall never forget Cooper's acting in *Macbeth* last spring, when he was stimulated to exertion by the presence of a number of British officers. I have seen nothing to equal it in England. Cooper requires excitement to arouse him from a monotonous commonplace manner he is apt to fall into, in consequence of acting so often before indifferent houses.

WASHINGTON IRVING : 'Life and Letters,' Dec. 28, 1815, *vol. i., chap. 19.*

As regards Cooper in comparison to Kemble, Cooke, or Kean, he is not so great an actor as either of the three, and must take his position as fourth on the roll. But in placing him there he must not be taken from the first-class stars. . . . In natural grace, Cooper is far beyond any actor I have ever seen, and he is, too, the best *Hamlet* on the stage, he is even more scholarly than Kemble, and if not so startling as Kean, or so grand as Kemble in the part, he is certainly far less rude than the former, and more natural than the latter. . . . His deportment to me is always full of natural dignity ; his action and whole manner is chaste, vigorous and characteristic, and his enunciation always

fine. I shall never forget his finished style of bowing to the audience. It acted like a mysterious magic over all, and at once made the audience his personal friends.

JOHN HOWARD PAYNE : Letter from London, June 19, 1817. Quoted in GABRIEL HARRISON'S 'Payne,' *chap. iii.*

When Cooper returned from one of his excursions to Europe, before the arrival of Cooke, I had the pleasure of seeing him in several parts on the Boston Theatre, not only assuming, but realizing the true portraiture of his respective characters. I took the liberty of praising him for the deviation from his usual high-spirited performances, in a periodical work, which I was then publishing. All complained that he had lost his fire ; I contended that he was exercising a well instructed, experienced, judgment ; but the *vox populi*, which they say is the *vox Dei*, seemed to restrain its usual acclamations. Yet it is highly to Mr. Cooper's honor that he persisted in the correct delineation of his characters, resigning the thunder of the millions for the silent attention of the few.

JAMES FENNELL : 'Apology for his Life.' Philadelphia, 1814, pp. 398-9.

As an actor in the vigor of his fame, he must have been one of the best of the Kemble school. It was not my good fortune to see him until he was in the wane ; but even then his performance of *Damon* was a masterpiece of art, which all who now perform the part on the American stage—from Mr. E. Forrest to those of humble pretensions—have imitated as

closely as possible. Carrying his energy almost to the verge of caricature, who that has seen Mr. Cooper in this part can forget the manner in which he receives from *Luculus* the intimation of the death of his horse, upon whose swiftness of foot depended the life of his dear friend perilled by this act ; the perfect stupor which for an instant overcomes his whole frame, suddenly roused to phrenzy by the ideal picture of the blood of *Pythias* flowing for him ; his stern resolution to sacrifice, on the instant, both himself and the slave, who from affection for his master, had wrought the ruin of his honor. Nothing on the stage—not even the third act of *Othello* by Kean—ever surpassed this. It was painfully true to nature, equalled only by the delirious joy, when he arrives just in time to save his friend, and falls exhausted by the effort at the foot of the scaffold,—receiving, instead of tumultuous applause, the tears of his audience. This was the conception of a master mind. For my own part after witnessing it, I always wished to leave the theatre, that nothing might break the charm of the evening.

FRANCIS COURTNEY WEMYSS : ‘Twenty-six Years,’
pp. 75–6.

I could not but admire the man’s splendid talent ; and he had administered to my vanity by waiting every night to see my farce, and making it part of his bargain, as he received a percentage, that I should appear on his nights ; but I looked on him as a brute notwithstanding, and he never spoke to me nor I to him. One night while he was performing *Virginius*, I was seated on a sofa placed under a large glass in the

greenroom, when he came in to adjust his toga. I moved my head out of his way and not my person ; he came close up to the glass, and then stooped his head within six inches of mine, and stared me straight in the face, and I said “Booh !” He looked perfectly astonished, and walked out amid a hearty laugh from the ladies, for I was an excellent clown in their estimation. A day or two afterwards he addressed me behind the scenes with, “Mr. Cowell, no one has been civil enough to introduce me to you, therefore I am compelled to do it myself !” and after paying me some very handsome compliments, ended with inviting me to dine with him ; and we have been very intimate ever since ; nor do I know in my large circle of acquaintance a more agreeable companion than Thomas Cooper. During my residence in the Northern States, I was a frequent guest, for a day or two at a time, at his delightful cottage at Bristol, Pennsylvania, where the luxuries attendant upon affluence were so regulated by good taste, that Cooper never appeared to such good advantage as when at home. His family was numerous and very interesting. He used to boast of never allowing his children to cry. “Sir, when my children were young and began to cry, I always dashed a glass of water in their face, and that so astonished them, that they would leave off ; and if they began again I’d dash another, and keep on increasing the dose until they were entirely cured.”

JOE COWELL : ‘Thirty Years Among the Players,’
vol. ii., chap. 2.

In his visits to Providence he was always welcomed by large audiences, and was the pet, the idol of the

town. He was richly endowed in voice, person, and feature, and possessed all the other qualifications essential to distinguished success upon the stage. *Macbeth* and *Othello* were his best Skaksperean delineations, and his *Damon* has never been equalled by any one, except Edwin Forrest. He received immense sums in the exercise of his professional talents, but they were spent in sumptuous living. As old age was stealing upon him, he studied no new parts, but confined himself to an unvarying repetition of a few, in which when his genius shone in its meridian brightness, he had won full-handed thunders, and consequently he declined in popular favor.

CHARLES BLAKE: 'Providence Stage,' *chap. 6, pp. 147-8.*

Brutus (Lucius Junius) is one of the characters in which Mr. Cooper excels. . . . The noble patriot, watching like a crouched lion, the moment when he may revenge his country's wrongs and his own, and concealing his motive under the semblance of insanity, was performed by Mr. Cooper with great talent. . . . The genius of Mr. Cooper is always powerful, and he never fails to do himself honor where there is a strong passion tearing the heart, that is too haughty to show its power—where two different emotions are striving for mastery—or where he can wrap himself in lofty meditation, or display the outline of his fine figure in some striking position. But when the feelings become too strong for longer reserve—when passion, like a mighty flood breaking down all obstacles, will have way, and goes forth in its fury, scorning every opposition—then it is that Mr. Cooper rises to the height of

histrionic excellence, and exhibits specimens of acting seldom, if ever, surpassed.

New York Mirror, Oct. 25, 1823.

Mr. Cooper's *Iago* is well known to the public, and we do not hesitate to say that it is by far the best ever seen since the days of Cooke.

Ibid., Feb. 7, 1824.

On Monday evening the tragedy of 'King Lear'—*Lear*, Mr. Cooper; *Edgar*, Mr. Conway. . . . It both surprised and mortified us, to see Conway in the petty character of *Edgar*, take away the applause from Cooper as *Lear*. We feel a delicacy after what we have said in favor of Mr. Cooper's acting in now condemning it. But we are bound to speak candidly on the subject, and declare that we did not believe it in Cooper's power to personify *Lear* so unsuccessfully. This gentleman's talents are certainly of a high order, but must be confined to such characters as *Brutus*, *Damon*, *Virginius*, etc. *Lear* does not suit him, it seems to be out of his line.

Ibid., Feb. 14, 1824.

Cooper's *Jaffier* was chaste, elegant and true to nature. In the scene where he attempts to kill *Belvidera*, he was particularly excellent; there was no affectation, rant, nor mouthing, as is common in this part with Kean and other *Jaffiers* that we have seen, but every movement and action was elegant and proper, every syllable pronounced with precision, and each word breathed the deep feelings of a heart torn and distracted by various passions.

Ibid., April 10, 1824.

Mr. Cooper as *Glenalvon* stalked before us in all the bygone glory of ten years since, when his misconceptions were esteemed originality, or forgotten in the elegance of his demeanor, and the richness of his mellow-toned voice. Who that the gods made theatrical at that almost forgotten period will not remember the peculiar high tone of his *Virginius*? "I said I would be patient, and I am"—with the indrawn breath and the characteristic flourish of the arm. It was not fair to judge him now with a "critic's eye." We look upon him as the property of former times. An old fallen oak putting out a few green branches—a broken column, supporting some roof erected over its carved beauties to supply the purposes of strangers to those by whom it was sculptured and admired. We are glad ever to have an opportunity to welcome a gleam of ancient light across the paths of this once idolized veteran; and when his faults become too conspicuous to be hidden beneath the cloak of charitable recollections, we shake our head, like aged Ossian, "over the joys that are departed," and think "old *Cassius* still."

Ibid., Sept. 3, 1831.

In 1834 Mr. Cooper took a benefit in New York, when Miss Priscilla Cooper, his daughter, made her first appearance. The play was Knowles's '*Virginius*,' and the fact that the daughter, more in hopes of affording a support to an aged parent than from any predilections for the stage was to appear, attracted a great house. During the first scene as well as the second, there was an anxiety to behold the young daughter. This was heightened in a wonderful degree when *Virginius* (Cooper) said: "Send her to me,

Servia ;" and every heart beat when *Virginia* (Miss Cooper) came tripping in, and stood before her *own* father saying : "Well, father, what's your will?" The whole house burst forth into one simultaneous shout of approbation, louder and longer than Cooper himself had ever received. It was several moments before he was enabled to reply ; and indeed he could not if he would, for both the father and daughter were so overwhelmed that their feelings found utterance in tears.

W. W. CLAPP : 'Records of the Boston Stage,' *chap.* 4, *p.* 64.

The physical powers of endurance of this eminent actor were most remarkable, nay, unprecedented, as a proof of which we will cite one or two circumstances. He performed the journeys from Philadelphia to New Orleans driving a tandem, and handling "the ribbons" himself to fulfil professional engagements, in an old style gig, sufficiently ample to contain his trunks and wardrobe. He frequently played at the Park Theatre, New York, and at the Walnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia, alternate nights in the week, performing his journey and never failing to "come to time," which was considered through the heavy sandy roads of New Jersey a Herculean performance. Cooper was, probably, taking him all in all, the most remarkable actor in the two hemispheres. Besides the long and fatiguing journeys performed in his gig, and playing his most arduous rôles many consecutive nights, he was in the constant practice of making journeys of miles on foot during an engagement, merely for exercise, as he would say. In his habits he was

scrupulously temperate, using neither spirituous liquor or tobacco in any shape—being also exceedingly frugal in his diet. For promptitude in fulfilling a professional engagement, he stood without a rival. He never was known to fail to meet an engagement, no matter what distance he had to travel, or however unfavorable the weather. Cooper, like Forrest, made a great mistake in remaining too long upon the stage. They both should have retired before their well-earned laurels began to wither ; before “the sere and yellow leaf” of time began to tell upon their physical powers. Cooper made his last appearance upon the stage, as also did Forrest, at the Albany Pearl Street Theatre. Cooper, in impersonating, at this time, his favorite character of *Damon*, produced a very affecting scene, exciting the deepest sorrow among his old admirers. It was plain to be seen that his physical powers were rapidly failing. In the scene where he rushes in at the very “nick of time” to save his friend *Pythias* from the headsman’s axe, he made an attempt to leap upon the scaffold, but his physical energies failing he became completely exhausted. It was indeed a sorry sight !

H. D. STONE : ‘Theatrical Reminiscences,’ chap. 40,
pp. 207, 208–9.

JOHN LISTON.

1776—1846.

Quaint Liston, simple with a native ease,
In dull, dry humor, never fails to please.
In act to preach he seems. His open throat,
And fingers spread, the Methodist denote.
In the soft rustic, fancying he is sly,
Th' affected fop, who bids us look and die ;
The solemn lout, whose brain is butter'd pap,
Whose very countenance compels a clap ;
Liston unrivall'd rules : th' astonish'd stare,
The comic horror, the self-certain air,
All are his own ; in vain would others seek
To copy chops so ugly and unique.
Yet small the circle of his comic course ;
Unskill'd in boist'rous mirth, or manly force :
Too smooth and unimpassion'd e'er to blaze,
He moves our admiration, not amaze.

The 'Thespiad,' (1809).



JOHN LISTON
As Dominie Sampson.

JOHN LISTON.

John Liston, the son of a watchmaker in Soho, was born in 1776, and received his education in the neighborhood of his father's house. He was, for some time, second master of St. Martin's (Bishop Tenison's) School, then situated in Castle Street at the back of the National Gallery; but lost his position for indulging in "stage-plays" with the larger boys. After some experience as an amateur, he made his first appearance on the regular boards at a small theatre on the Strand, but soon drifted to Dublin, where he had the reputation of being a useful, although not a great tragedian. Here he attracted the attention of Stephen Kemble, who took him to Newcastle-on-Tyne, where he made the discovery that comedy, not tragedy, was his forte, and played eccentric old men, and country boys, of the *Tony Lumpkin* order, with great applause. His first decided hit was as *Diggory*, in 'She Stoops to Conquer.' Under the management of Mr. Colman, he was introduced to the Haymarket audiences on June 14, 1805, as *Zekiel Homespun*, and as *Sheepface* in the 'Village Lawyer,' and was at once accepted as a popular favorite. An engagement at Covent Garden, in its regular season, was the result; and here he first appeared on Oct. 15, 1805, as *Jacob Gawkey* in the 'Chapter of Accidents;' remaining at that house

until the season of 1823, when he went to Drury Lane. In 1831 he was engaged by Madam Vestris for the Olympic, at the then enormous salary of £100 per week ; the first comedian who was considered worthy of the hire given to the players of leading tragic parts. He was at the Olympic for six seasons, and may be said virtually to have closed there his dramatic career. He died March 22, 1846. Liston's most successful part was *Paul Pry*, to which he objected on its original production, on the ground that the character had no connection with the main plot of the piece. He came to the first rehearsal imperfect in his lines, discouraged and disgusted, and with no idea how his part should be played or dressed. The quaint figure of a stage carpenter; in cossack trowsers tucked into Wellington boots, gave him his first hint, and interest in the rôle, and decided the singular costume of all the *Paul Prys* from that day to this. It was received on its first night by tumultuous applause ; and brought him not only fame, but great profit. His early passion for tragedy never left him, however, and Dr. Doran finds record of his having played *Octavian*, *Baron Wildenheim* and even *Romeo*, in his later years on his benefit nights.

Liston's face was his fortune. Of it Charles Lamb said, "But what a face it was !" and in it Nature seems to have tried how far she could violate all her established rules of beauty. It was grotesque to a degree ; the very sight of it, before a word was uttered provoking shouts of laughter the moment he stepped upon the stage. His manner in its half conscious, half unconscious, drollery was as irresistible as his face. His humor was quaint, original, dry and unaffected ;

and the settled melancholy of his speech and action which even in his early years seems to have been natural to him, on or off the stage, added by its unexpected contrast, greatly to the effect of his comedy. His success lay not in what he said, but in the way he said it ; the quiet serenity of his most absurd performances often surprising and upsetting entirely, the gravity of his fellow actors. Charles Mathews who saw him at York without a smile, and who felt that he could not conscientiously say a word in his favor to the management of the Haymarket when he sought his first engagement there in 1805, was so convulsed with laughter, playing *Scout* to his *Sheepface* in the 'Village Lawyer' on the night of his *début*, that he was scarcely able to utter an intelligible word of his own part, while on the stage with him. Boaden found it impossible to convey any idea of Liston's powers to those who had not seen him. There was no labor or system in his efforts to be comic. He seemed to be comic against his will, and despite the settled gloom which depressed him. He was fond of wine, convivial society, and the practical joking carried to such childish excess in his day ; but he suffered from some chronic nervous disease, and his later life was in itself almost a tragedy. Mr. Planché describes him as sitting for hours, day after day, at his window watching and counting the omnibuses that passed by his door, and expressing the greatest distress or displeasure if one of them chanced to be behind its regular time. He spoke rarely and never smiled.

LAURENCE HUTTON.

We accordingly find him shortly after making his *début*, as it is called, upon the Norwich boards, in the season of that year, being then in the twenty-second year of his age. Having a natural bent to tragedy, he chose the part of *Pyrrhus*, in the ‘Distressed Mother,’ to Sally Parker’s *Hermione*. We find him afterwards as *Barnwell*, *Altamont*, *Chamont*, etc.; but, as if Nature had destined him to the sock, an unavoidable infirmity absolutely incapacitated him for tragedy. His person, at this latter period of which I have been speaking, was graceful, and even commanding; his countenance set to gravity: he had the power of arresting the attention of an audience at first sight almost beyond any other tragic actor. But he could not hold it. To understand this obstacle, we must go back a few years to those appalling reveries at Charnwood. Those illusions, which had vanished before the dissipation of a less recluse life and more free society, now in his solitary tragic studies, and amid the intense calls upon feeling incident to tragic acting, came back upon him with tenfold vividness. In the midst of some most pathetic passage (the parting of *Jaffier* with his dying friend, for instance), he would suddenly be surprised with a fit of violent horse-laughter. While the spectators were all sobbing before him with emotion, suddenly one of those grotesque faces would peep out upon him, and he could not resist the impulse. A timely excuse once or twice served his purpose, but no audience could be expected to bear repeatedly this violation of the continuity of feeling. He describes them (the illusions) as so many demons haunting him, and paralyzing every effect. Even now, I am told, he cannot recite the famous

soliloquy in ‘Hamlet,’ even in private, without immoderate bursts of laughter. However, what he had not force of reason sufficient to overcome, he had good sense enough to turn into emolument, and determined to make a commodity of his distemper. He prudently exchanged the buskin for the sock, and the illusions instantly ceased, or, if they occurred for a short season, by their very co-operation added a zest to his comic vein,—some of his most catching faces being (as he expressed it) little more than transcripts and copies of those extraordinary phantasmata.

CHARLES LAMB: ‘Last Essays of Elia. Biographical Memoirs of Mr. Liston.’*

I love to laugh *with* a man not *at* him. Liston’s comedy, to me, was such that when I have laughed at it I have always been ashamed of myself. I feel that I ought to have pitied, not laughed. There is a comical side of most human creatures and mundane accidents, and there is likewise a pitiable one:—Liston’s comedy always appeared to me to belong to the latter; instead of making me laugh, it made me melancholy. Besides, Liston could not in *one* character play Shakspere. His *Bottom* was as heavy as lead, his *Malvolio* stiff, rigid and sapless,—he had not the least conception of the humor of either.

WM. ROBSON: the ‘Old Playgoer.’ Letter 6.

* Did you read the ‘Memoirs of Liston?’—and did you guess whose it was? Of all the lies I ever put off, I value this most. It is from top to toe, every paragraph, pure invention, and has passed for gospel; has been republished in newspapers and in the penny playbills of the night as an authentic account. I shall certainly go to the naughty man some day for my fibbings.

CHARLES LAMB: Letter to Miss Hutchinson, Jan. 20, 1825.

With Collier, etc., at Covent Garden, 'Twelfth Night.' Liston's *Malvolio* excellent. I never saw him to greater advantage. It is a character in all respects adapted to him. His inimitable gravity till he receives the letter, and his incomparable smiles in the cross-gartered scene, are the perfection of nature and art united.

HENRY CRABB ROBINSON: 'Reminiscences,' vol. i., chap. 14, Jan. 9, 1811.

At the Haymarket. An agreeable evening. I saw nothing but Liston. In 'Quite Correct' he is an inn-keeper very anxious to be quite correct, and understanding everything literally. His humorous stupidity is the only pleasant thing in the piece. In 'Paul Pry' he is not the mar-plot, but the make-plot of the play, for by his prying and picking out of the water some letter by which a plot is detected, he exposes a knavish housekeeper, who is on the point of inveigling an old bachelor into marriage. Liston's inimitable face is the only amusement.

Ibid., vol. ii., chap. 3, May 27, 1826.

In Mr. Liston's best performances he may be called natural in every sense of the word. His accuracy of conception enables him to represent with equal felicity the most true characters and the most affected habits; and he passes from the simplest rustic to the most conceited pretender with undiminished easiness of attainment. The actor never carries him beyond the characteristic strength of his part; he adds nothing of stage affectation, and diminishes nothing of nature; yet his manner is so irresistibly humorous that he can

put the audience into good humor with less effort, perhaps, than any other comedian.

LEIGH HUNT : 'Critical Essays,' London, 1807, p. 98.

The progress of civilization is in proportion to the number of commonplaces current in society. For instance, if we met with a stranger at an inn or in a stage-coach, who knows nothing but his own affairs, his shop, his customers, his farm, his pigs, his poultry, we can carry on no conversation with him on these local or personal matters ; the only way is to let him have all the talk to himself. But if he has fortunately ever seen Mr. Liston act, this is an immediate topic of mutual conversation ; and we agree together the rest of the evening in discussing the merits of that inimitable actor, with the same satisfaction as in talking over the affairs of the most intimate friend.

WILLIAM HAZLITT : the ' Round Table,' 'On Actors and Acting.'

There has always been to me something pathetic in the thought of Liston, with his grave and serious turn of mind, his quick sensibilities, and his intense yearning for applause, fatally classed by Nature among those to whom tragic expression was impossible—feeling within him tragic capacity, and knowing that his face was a grotesque mask, and his voice a suggestion of drollery. I think it not unlikely that, with another face and voice, Liston might have succeeded in tragedy ; but this is only saying that, had he been another man, he would have been another actor.

GEORGE HENRY LEWES : on 'Actors and the Art of Acting,' *chap. v.*, pp. 57-8.

Liston, the famous comedian, was at this time a member of the Durham company, and though he began his career there by reciting Collins's 'Ode to the Passions,' attired in a pea-green coat, buckskins, top-boots, and powder, with a scroll in his hand ; and followed this essay of his powers with the tragic actor's battle-horse, the part of *Hamlet* ; he soon found his peculiar gift to lie in the diametrically opposite direction of broad farce. Of this he was perpetually interpolating original specimens in the gravest performances of his fellow-actors ; on one occasion, suddenly presenting to Mrs. Stephen Kemble, as she stood disheveled at the side scene, ready to go on the stage as *Ophelia* in her madness, a basket with carrots, turnips, onions, leeks, and pot-herbs, instead of the conventional flowers and straws of the stage maniac, which sent the representative of the fair *Ophelia* on in a broad grin, with ill-suppressed fury and laughter, which must have given quite an original character of verisimilitude to the insanity she counterfeited.

On another occasion he sent all the little chorister boys on, in the lugubrious funeral procession in *Romeo* and *Juliet*, with pieces of brown paper in their hands to wipe their tears with.

The suppression of that very dreadful piece of stage pageantry has at last, I believe, been conceded to the better taste of modern audiences ; but even in my time it was still performed, and an exact representation of a funeral procession, such as one meets every day in Rome, with torch-bearing priests, and bier covered with its black velvet pall embroidered with skull and cross-bones, with a corpse-like figure stretched upon it, marched round the stage, chanting

some portion of the fine Roman Catholic requiem music. I have twice been in the theatre when persons have been seized with epilepsy during that ghastly exhibition, and think the good judgment that has discarded such a mimicry of a solemn religious ceremony highly commendable.

Another evening, Liston, having painted Fanny Kemble's face like a clown's, posted her at one of the stage side doors to confront her mother, poor Mrs. Stephen Kemble, entering at the opposite one to perform some dismally serious scene of dramatic pathos, who, on suddenly beholding this grotesque apparition of her daughter, fell into convulsions of laughter and coughing, and half audible exclamations of "Go, away, Fanny ! I'll tell your father, miss !" which must have had the effect of a sudden seizure of madness to the audience, accustomed to the rigid decorum of the worthy woman in the discharge of her theatrical duties.

Long after these provincial exploits, and when he had become the comedian *par excellence* of the English stage, for which eminence nature and art had alike qualified him by the imperturbable gravity of his extraordinarily ugly face, which was such an irresistibly comical element in his broadest and most grotesque performances, Mr. Liston used to exert his ludicrous powers of tormenting his fellow-actors in the most cruel manner upon that sweet singer, Miss Stephens (afterwards Countess of Essex). She had a curious nervous trick of twitching her drees before she began to sing ; this peculiarity was well known to all her friends, and Liston, who certainly was one of them, used to agonize the poor woman by standing at the

side scene, while the symphony of her pathetic ballads was being played, and indicating by his eyes and gestures that something was amiss with the trimming or bottom of her dress : when, as invariably as he chose to play the trick, poor Miss Stephens used to begin to twitch and catch at her petticoat, and half hysterical, between laughing and crying, would enchant and entrance her listeners with her exquisite voice and pathetic rendering of ‘ Savourneen Deelish,’ or the ‘ Banks of Allan Water.’

FRANCES ANN KEMBLE : ‘ Records of a Girlhood,’
chap. i.

Liston, as well as G. F. Cooke, seemed privileged to take what liberties he liked with his audience. Barham tells an anecdote of Hook, who, in conjunction with Liston, played the following trick off on some country friends of his :—A young gentleman, the son of a baronet, wished to escort his *affiancée* to a London theatre. Hook procured them two dress-circle seats. When the curtain rose, Liston (who had been primed by Hook) appeared : his first words were greeted with laughter ; he paused, looked round him with an offended air, and approaching the footlights, exclaimed, melodramatically, “I don’t understand this conduct, ladies and gentlemen. I am not accustomed to be laughed at. I can’t imagine what you can see ridiculous in me. Why, I declare, there’s Harry B——, too, and his cousin, Martha J——,” pointing full at the country couple ; “what business have they to come here and laugh at me, I should like to know ? I’ll go and tell his father, and hear what *he* thinks of it.” The audience to a man turned and stared at the unfortunate

pair, who, probably imagining they were in a mad-house, scrambled from their seats and rushed from the house, amid peals of laughter.

He was a great punster. Once whilst at Plymouth, a youthful midshipman swaggered into the theatre flourishing his dirk. "Why don't you attend to the announcement at the bottom of the bills," said Liston to the doorkeeper. "Can't you read—'*Children in arms not admitted!*'" He once asked Mathews to play for his benefit. Mathews having to act elsewhere, excused himself by saying, "He would if he could, but he couldn't split himself in halves." "I don't know that," said Liston: "I have often seen you play in two pieces."

W. CLARK RUSSELL: 'Representative Actors,' pp. 322-3, *foot notes*.

I said Liston appeared to me to have more comic humor than any one in my time, though he was not properly an actor. Northcote asked if he was not low spirited, and told the story (I suspect an old one) of his consulting a physician on the state of his health, who recommended him to go to see Liston. I said he was grave and prosing, but I did not know there was anything the matter with him, though I had seen him walking along the street the other day, with his face as fixed as if he had a lockjaw, a book in his hand, looking neither to the right nor the left, and very much like his own *Lord Duberly*.

WM. HAZLITT: 'Conversations of Northcote,' xv.

Some of Liston's best parts were created at the Olympic, and he was probably never seen to greater

advantage than there. His quietest and best manner fitted the house, and one of his richest displays of humor was in his last original part, in a one act farce, called 'A Peculiar Position.' In this he personated an elderly coxcomb who believed himself to be irresistibly attractive to women, and this was a source not of gratification, but of annoyance and perplexity to him. Nothing could exceed the grave mixture of disgust and resignation with which he permitted himself to be fallen in love with. A great feature of Liston's humor was its stolidity—his own perfect immobility in the most ridiculous situations. A good instance of this was in the 'Two Figaros.' Liston played the elder *Figaro*, and it fell to his lot to speak the tag of the piece which included an adaptation of two well-known lines by Pope. The audiences of those days had some slight acquaintance with literature, though the opportunity of being erudite in music-hall matters was denied them, and when Liston came forward and said—

If to my share some human failings fall,
the house ever recognisant of the actor's grotesqueness of features, and knowing the second line of the quotation, burst into roars of laughter that lasted some minutes ; not a muscle of his countenance did Liston move, not an attempt did he make to go on, till perfect quiet was restored, and then he spoke with most correct intonation, gravely and as if there was or could be nothing comic in the application, the second line,

Look in my face and you'll forget them all.

J. M. LANGFORD, in the '*Era Almanack*,' 1870,
72-3.

Liston had taken his formal farewell of the public after the close of the Olympic in 1837 by a benefit at the Lyceum Theatre. The extreme depression under which that great comic actor occasionally labored has often been recorded ; and there was also, no doubt, a strong romantic and sentimental side to his character ; but his love of fun was great, and his humor, on and off the stage, irresistible. Like Young and others, his contemporaries, he delighted, as I have already premised, in practical joking in the public streets. Walking one day through Leicester Square with Mr. Miller, the theatrical bookseller of Bow Street, Liston happened to mention casually that he was going to have tripe for dinner, a dish of which he was particularly fond. Miller, who hated it, said, "Tripe ! Beastly stuff ! How can you eat it ?" That was enough for Liston. He stopped suddenly in the crowded thoroughfare in front of Leicester House, and holding Miller by the arm, exclaimed, in a loud voice, "What, sir ! So you mean to assert that you don't like tripe ?" "Hush !" muttered Miller, "don't talk so loud ; people are staring at us." "I ask you, sir," continued Liston, in still louder tones, "do you not like tripe ?" "For Heaven's sake, hold your tongue !" cried Miller ; "you'll have a crowd round us." And naturally people began to stop and wonder what was the matter. This was exactly what Liston wanted, and again he shouted, "Do you mean to say you don't like tripe ?" Miller, making a desperate effort, broke from him, and hurried in consternation through Cranbourne Alley, followed by Liston, bawling after him, "There he goes !—that's the man who doesn't like tripe !" to the immense amusement of the

numerous passengers, many of them appearing around the corner of Jermyn Street, before a most emphatic impeachment of his veracity rolled like thunder over the heads of the amazed but amused pedestrians from Waterloo Place to Piccadilly.

J. R. PLANCHÉ: 'Recollections and Reflections,'
vol. ii., chap. 3.

CHARLES MAYNE YOUNG.

1777—1856.

Young treads in Kemble's steps, but treads behind ;
The same perfections and defects we find.
The labor'd style, strained stiffness, stilted tread,
And in the slow toil of every sentence said ;
His tone to utmost tension stretcht and strung,
Leaves no commanding effort to his tongue.
The bow not slackened ere the shaft is sent,
Springs with less nerve than were it oft unbent.
To copy nature is by Kemble tried :
To copy Kemble, Young is satisfied.
Not from the world, but stage, he draws his plan,
And mimics not the species, but the man.

The 'Thespiad,' (1809).



CHARLES MAYNE YOUNG
As Brutus.

CHARLES MAYNE YOUNG.

Charles, the second son of Thomas and Anna Beignna Young, was born on Jan. 10, 1777. His father was an eminent surgeon of London with the character and disposition of a fiend, but with varied accomplishments and a mind of no little power. Charles when nearly ten years old was taken by Dr. Müller, the husband of Charles's aunt, to Copenhagen, where the good doctor, as body-servant and confidential adviser to the king of Denmark, had a suite of apartments in the royal palace. Charles remained in Denmark a year, having made firm friends of the king and queen. The king even offered to pay for his education if his father would permit the boy to remain in Denmark. The offer was refused, and Charles returned to London, and was then sent to Eton. In 1790-1791 he was taken from Eton, probably for financial reasons, and placed at the Merchant Tailors' School. Life in the Young household must have been terrible. The father of the family was a cruel tyrant at home and a shameless profligate abroad. At length, when Thomas Young proposed to bring his mistress to the house, the three sons—George, Charles, and Winslow—removed their mother from so degrading a position. Charles entered the mercantile house of Loughnan & Co., and, while still a clerk, began his studies for the stage.

In 1798 he made his *début* in Liverpool under the name of Mr. Green. The play chosen for his first appearance was 'Douglas,' Young probably taking the part of *Douglas*, though some of his biographers assert that he first appeared as *Young Norval*. His success was such that he appeared under his own name at Manchester in the following year, playing a round of leading parts. During the next four years he acted at Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow and other places. At this time Walter Scott wrote of him as an addition to the society of Edinburgh. In 1804, while at the Liverpool Theatre, he met, and fell in love, with the beautiful and accomplished Julia Ann Grimani, whom he married at St. Ann's Church, in that city, March 9, 1805. Their married life was thoroughly happy while it lasted, but on July 17, 1806, Mrs. Young died, shortly after the birth of a son, Julian Charles. The shock was a terrible one, and for six years the bereaved husband could scarcely look upon the innocent cause of his misfortune. Three months after the death of his wife, Young returned to the theatre, resolved to seek distraction in the excitement of his profession. He first appeared before a London audience, June 22, 1807, at the Haymarket, as *Hamlet*. George Colman was then in control of the theatre, and agreed that Young should receive £14 per week and a clear benefit at the end of the season, warranted to be worth at least £100. The Haymarket was burned to the ground in the following year, so it became necessary to move to the Opera House, where Young continued to grow in favor with the London public. In 1809-10 we find him at Covent Garden, whither he had gone at a salary of £18 per week, and where he remained

for upwards of twelve years. In 1822 he accepted an offer from Drury Lane to play opposite parts to Edmund Kean, in some cases alternating with that actor. His success was so great that in the following year Covent Garden re-engaged him at his Drury Lane salary of £50 per night, for three performances a week.

On May 30, 1832, he bade farewell to the stage as *Hamlet*; thereafter he lived quietly amid a large circle of cultivated and influential friends. He died at Brighton, regretted by all who knew him, on June 26, 1856.

His character, whether public or private, was never in any way attacked. "Mr. Young," says Fanny Kemble, "was a universal favorite in the best London society, and an eagerly sought guest in pleasant country-houses, where his zeal for country sports, his knowledge of and fondness for horses, his capital equestrianism and inexhaustible fund of humor, made him as popular with the men as his sweet, genial temper, good breeding, musical accomplishments and infinite drollery did with the women." To the day of his death he grieved for the loss of the wife he had loved so well; and his dying words expressed the joyful hope that he should see her once again.

As an actor he was clearly of the school of John Philip Kemble,—having the precise enunciation and grandiloquent manner of Kemble, but not, perhaps, so noticeable as in that tragedian; it may be said that he was more natural than Kemble, but not so majestic.

Though he gave numerous evidences in private life of a comedian's power, he appeared on the stage either in tragedy or in such comedies as tragedians

affect. His voice was finer, his bearing more refined, and his person far handsomer than were those of John Kemble. Kean, in their struggle at Drury Lane, acknowledged Young's power, spoke of his rival's personal advantages and his "d—d musical voice," and added, "I tell you what, Young is not only an actor such as I did not dream him to have been, but he is a gentleman!" Fanny Kemble says he never wanted propriety, dignity, and a certain stately grace, but never had either fire, passion, or tenderness.

Among the parts he played the following seem to have been the principal : *Hamlet*, *Romeo*, *Petruchio*, *Othello*, *Iago*, *Ford* (in the 'Merry Wives of Windsor'), *Macbeth*, *Cassius*, *Falstaff*, *King John*, *Lear*, *Shylock*, *Jaques*, *Coriolanus*, *Douglas*, *Young Norval*, and at least once, *Old Norval*, in Home's 'Douglas ;' *Don Felix*, in the 'Wonder ;' *Osmond*, in the 'Castle Spectre ;' *Rolla*, in 'Pizarro ;' *Penruddock*, in the 'Wheel of Fortune ;' *Haller*, in the 'Stranger ;' *Sir Edward Mortimer*, in the 'Iron Chest ;' *Lord Townly*, in the 'Provoked Husband ;' *Gustavus Vasa* ; *Falkland*, in the 'Rivals ;' *Beverly*, in the 'Gamester ;' *Hastings*, in 'Jane Shore ;' *Jaffier* and *Pierre*, in 'Venice Preserved ;' *Zanga*, in the 'Revenge ;' *Sir Pertinax Mac-Sycophant*, in the 'Man of the World ;' *Rienzi*, in Miss Mitford's tragedy of that name ; *Brutus*, in John Howard Payne's play ; *Macheath*, in the 'Beggar's Opera ;' *Chamont*, in the 'Orphan ;' and *Alexander* and *Clytus*, in Nat. Lee's 'Alexander the Great.'

HAROLD G. HENDERSON.

Young was of course greatly and deservedly applauded: his grand declamatory style wound up the speeches of *Zanga* and *Mortimer* with telling effect. His *Richard* was not good, but his performance of *Hamlet* (a character that so few are found to agree upon) had as usual its very numerous admirers.

He gave me a little advice or caution, which was kindly meant, although it did not then carry conviction with it. "Young gentleman, you expend a degree of power unnecessarily: half the energy and fire that you employ would be more than sufficient. You will only waste your strength, if you do not bear this in mind."

W. C. MACREADY: 'Reminiscences,' *chap. iv.*,
1813-14.

In 1817 I went with Mr. Isaac Pocock, the author of the 'Miller and his Men,' to see John Philip Kemble bid farewell. Young had not only an admiration for Kemble as an actor, but felt gratitude to him as a man for having reflected honor on the profession by his moral conduct in it. The last time they played together, which was in 'Julius Cæsar,' Kemble, after the play, entered Young's dressing-room, and presented him with several properties which he had worn in favorite characters, and begged him to keep them in memory of their having fought together, alluding to the battle near Sardis, in which, as *Brutus* and *Cassius*, they had been just engaged. "Well," he said, "we've often had high words together on the stage, but never off." On Young saying something to him, which touched him, he suddenly caught hold

of his hand, wrung it in his, and then hurried from the room, saying :

For this present
I would not, so with love I might entreat you
Be any further moved.

JULIAN CHARLES YOUNG : 'Memoir of Charles Mayne Young,' chap. 3.

I am delighted with Young, who acts with great judgment, discrimination and feeling, I think him much the best actor at present on the English stage. His *Hamlet* is a very fine performance, as is likewise his *Stranger*, *Pierre*, *Chamont*, etc.

WASHINGTON IRVING : 'Life and Letters,' Dec. 28, 1815, vol. i., chap. 19.

Dr. Gibbes is hurried to death, the people are so ill ; he saw me half in hysterics at Young's giving *Lear*, and he came the next morning to feel my pulse, kind creature.

MRS. PIOZZI : 'Autobiography and Letters,' April 27, 1819.

Charles Young succeeded Betty ; a delicious change; equal to a squeeze of lemon after a dose of jalop—a perfect gentleman, and most amiable man. I have often heard him called an imitator of Kemble, but I never saw any resemblance ; it is true his good sense made him believe he had not the genius to soar above his great coadjutor, and he prudently contented himself to adopt his conceptions ; if you saw Kemble in *Hamlet* one night and Young the next, you would discover no beauties stepped over, and no new ones

displayed ; but all that Kemble had done for the character would be done by Young twenty-four hours after him, in every sense of the expression.

JOE COWELL : 'Thirty Years Among the Players,'
part i., chap. 10.

Young was a really good actor—his figure was unexceptionable—his voice fine—his countenance expressive, and his judgment excellent ; he had no stage tricks.

P. GENEST : 'History of the Stage,' vol. ix., p. 536.

After Kean's departure for other towns, the performances at Exeter hung fire, until we had a visit from Charles Young, the legitimate successor of John Kemble at Covent Garden. He was a very amiable man, a scholar, gifted with a fine figure and a noble face. His conceptions of the great tragic characters which devolved upon him were usually just, and the only circumstance which detracted from his excellence as an actor was a lisp, of which he was strangely unconscious. When Mathews the elder gave imitations of all the most popular actors then on the stage, Charles Young said to him, "I went to thee you latht night at the Lytheum ; your imitationonth were very good, but why did you make me thpeak with a lithp ?"

'Autobiography of an Actor,' in the *Theatre*, June, 1883.

On the very first night of their appearance in the same play I was present ; on the very last night of their playing together I was present ; and in every piece in which they acted together I have seen them.

On each and every one of these occasions I should find it difficult to determine which carried off the palm. The writer of the last published life of Edmund Kean has been pleased to write in terms of measureless contempt of Charles Young's powers as an artist. He has a perfect right to his opinion ; but I doubt if his hero, had he been alive, would have endorsed it, or admitted either the justice or the good taste of his criticism. And I venture to think so for this reason. Both the rival candidates for histrionic fame were engaged on terms of perfect equality. Each received exactly the same salary, each was in turn to play the same parts : and had the manager thought there was such vast disparity between the qualifications of the two candidates, he would never have given both the same terms. If Kean had considered himself so far superior to Young in public estimation, he would have been indignant at his receiving the same salary as himself, and would have expected his name to be printed in the bills in larger characters than his rival's. To show that Kean did not think as meanly of Young as his secretary-biographer seems to have done, I may mention that on the first night of their playing together, while Young was in his dressing-room receiving congratulations on his success from "troops of friends," Kean was storming about in search of Price, the manager, and vowing that he would not give up *Othello* the next night to Young. On Price's telling him that he was bound by the terms of his agreement to do so, he exclaimed, in violent anger, "I don't care ! if he plays after me the same part I have just played, I will throw up my engagement, and you may seek your redress in a court of law." On Price's trying to

pacify him, and asking him what had caused him to think so differently in the evening from what he had done in the morning, he said, "I had never seen Young act. Every one about me for several years has told me he could not hold a farthing rushlight to me ; but he can ! He *is* an actor ; and though I flatter myself he could not act *Othello* as I do, yet what chance should I have in *Iago* after him, with his personal advantages and his d—d musical voice ? I don't believe he could play *Jaffier* as well as I can, but fancy me in *Pierre* after him ; I tell you what," said he, "Young is not only an actor, such as I did not dream him to have been, but he is a gentleman. Go to him, then, from me, and say that, if he will allow me to retain *Othello*, and to keep to *Jaffier*, if I succeed in it, I shall esteem it as a personal obligation conferred upon me. Tell him he has just made as great a hit in *Iago* as I ever did in *Othello*."

Young was anxious to oblige Price, knowing how seriously refusal on his part would affect the interests of the treasury, and unhesitatingly complied with Kean's request.

My impression as to the comparative powers of Kean and Young may fairly enough be regarded with suspicion. My judgment will be supposed to be biased by filial partiality. But I never was a blind admirer of my father's theatrical talent. It is, therefore, in no narrow spirit of partisanship, but under deliberate and impartial conviction that I shall try to distinguish between them, and award to each his due. Each had certain physical requisites which especially qualified him for his vocation. Young had a small, keen, brown, penetrating eye, overshadowed by a

strongly-defined and bushy eyebrow. Kean's eye was infinitely finer ; it was fuller, blacker, and more intense. When kindled by real passion off the stage, or by simulated passion on, it gleamed with such scorching lustre as literally to make those who stood beneath its rays quail. In this feature, beyond all question, he had an immense superiority over Young. In figure, stature, and deportment, Young had the advantage over Kean ; for he had height, which Kean had not ; and, though Young's limbs were not particularly well moulded, he moved them gracefully ; and his head, and throat, and bust, were classically moulded. Kean in his gait shuffled. Young trod the boards with freedom. Young's countenance was equally well adapted for the expression of pathos or of pride ; thus, in such parts as *Hamlet*, *Beverley*, *The Stranger*, *Daran*, *Pierre*, *Zanga*, and *Cassius*, he looked the men he represented. Kean's variable and expressive countenance, and even the insignificance of his person, rendered him the very type of a *Shylock*, a *Richard*, or a *Sir Giles Overreach*. Even his voice, which was harsh and husky (except in low and pathetic passages such as "the farewell" in 'Othello,' in which it was very touching), so far from detracting from its impressiveness, rather added to it. Young's voice, on the other hand, was full bodied, rich, powerful, and capable of every variety of modulation, and therefore in declamatory power he was greatly superior to Kean, and Kemble too. Beautiful in face and person as Kemble was, and great as he was as an actor, his asthma put him at a signal disadvantage with my father in speeches where volume of voice and the rapid delivery of long sentences was needed. The

great effects which Kean produced upon his audience were the spontaneous effusions of real genius. Young's happiest hits were the result of natural sensibility, quickness of apprehension, and study. Kean dazzled his audience by coruscations of fancy, and the vivid light which he shed on passages of which the meaning was obscure. Young hardly ever astonished ; but, with the unprejudiced, rarely failed to please. Kean's acting, as a rule, was unequal, negligent, and slipshod. He seemed to be husbanding his powers for a point, or for an outburst of impassioned feeling. Young's conceptions were good and truthful, and were harmoniously sustained.

He was always very glad to hear good preaching ; and when residing at Brighton, in old age, was a constant attendant on the ministry of Mr. Sortain. Mr. Bernal Osborne told me that, one Sunday morning, he was shown into the same pew with my father, whom he knew. He was struck with his devotional manner during the prayers, and by his wrapt attention during the sermon. But he found himself unable to maintain his gravity when, as the preacher paused to take breath after a long and eloquent outburst, the habits of the actor's former life betrayed themselves, and he uttered, in a deep undertone, the old familiar "Bravo."

He was sitting at dinner next a lady of rank and considerable ability, who was rather prone to entangle her neighbors at table in discussions on subjects in which she was well "up," when she suddenly appealed from the gentleman on her right to my father, who was on her left, and asked him if he would be kind enough to tell her the date of the Second

Punic War. He, who had not the remotest idea whether it was 218 before Christ, or 200 after, and who was too honest to screen his ignorance under the plea of forgetfulness, turned to her and said, in his most tragic tones, "Madam, I don't know anything about the Punic War ; and, what is more, I never did. My inability to answer your question has wrung from me the same confession which I once heard made by a Lancashire farmer, with an air of great pride, when appealed to by a party of his friends in a commercial room ; 'I tell ye what, in spite of all your bragging, I'll wedger (wager) I'm th' ignorantest man i' coompany.'"

JULIAN CHARLES YOUNG: 'Memoir of Charles Mayne Young,' chap 4.

The fact is, that nature and study made Mr. Young rather a fine disclaimer than a fine actor. Good, sound, sterling, sensible acting, Mr. Young's friends and admirers were sure to witness from him—but the heights and depths were not within his reach—he was a testy *Cassius*, a noble *Othello*, in the early scenes, a perfect *Foscari*, a spirited *Rienzi*—but he could not give *Lear's* curse so as to shiver your very nerves ; throw in all the exquisite finishing, artistical touches to *Hamlet* ; nor approach the real *Othello* in the two last wonderful acts : no, he was a great disclaimer. He played *Iago* better than he did *Othello* ; but in that even he was too much of the "honest, honest *Iago* ;" his manner was rather too frank.

WILLIAM ROBSON : the 'Old Playgoer.' Letter 8.

I had been exceedingly amused, I might say

interested, by watching at the Zoological Gardens the attention of an old monkey to a poor little sick young one. How related I had not ascertained. But describing the scenes I had witnessed one day in Young's company, he was so tickled with my imitation of the little invalid, that he immediately commenced one of the elder monkey, and whenever we met, in public or private, for many years afterwards kept up the joke. Upon one occasion I was talking to Sloman, the carpenter, on the stage at Covent Garden at the time Sheridan Knowles was reading one of his plays ('Old Maids,' I think), in the greenroom, when Young entered the theatre, and, seeing me, commenced his usual antics, to which, of course, I immediately responded. Sloman, who was a valuable old servant of the establishment, and on very familiar terms with every one in the theatre, rushed into the greenroom and announced that Mr. Young and Mr. Planché were "playing at monkeys" on the stage. In a moment the room was deserted, the whole of the company, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Mathews at their head, poured out of it to witness the exhibition, to the extreme and very natural annoyance of poor Knowles, whose reading was thus unceremoniously interrupted. Another day, as I was strolling westward through Coventry Street, Piccadilly, I became aware that a hackney coach was intentionally keeping pace with me and attracting the attention of passing strangers. On turning my head to see what was the cause, I observed what appeared to be the face of a large baboon, occupying nearly all the glass of the coach window, the eyes fixed on me with the most intensely serious expression. Startled for the moment, I speedily rec-

ognized Young, and laughingly nodded to him, but not a muscle of his features relaxed, and the face remained at the window, with the awful eyes bent upon me, as long as our course was in the same direction.

J. R. PLANCHÉ: 'Recollections and Reflections,' vol. ii., chap. 9.

Coming to Southwick Green, near Brighton, Sussex, and seeing at some small distance a little rustic village church, I repaired towards it. I like to stroll into a country churchyard, where the old forefathers of the hamlet sleep. It brings back to my mind all the soothing influence of Gray's immortal 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard.' Accordingly I stepped over the green, through the little swinging gate by the ivied porch, then intending to read some of the quaint epitaphs generally displayed, I came immediately in contact with a remarkable antique, cross-like tomb. The words were not easy to decipher, but the name of Young struck me. Could it be possible? It was possible! There, in this unpretending solitude, after life's fitful fever, slept well the gifted

CHARLES YOUNG.

The Hamlet, the Othello, the Macbeth! the Frantic Lover, the Jealous Husband, the Ambitious Thane: all compressed beneath a clod of earth! A few wild flowers, and a silent spot! Hush, memory! Tears be still! Speak heart!

EDWARD FITZBALL: 'Thirty-five Years of a Dramatic Author's Life,' vol. ii., pp. 332-3.

ELIZA O'NEILL.

1991—1872.

—What a form is here !
The imaginers of beauty did of old
O'er three rich forms of sculptured excellence
Scatter the naked graces ; but the hand
Of mightier Nature hath in thee combined
All varied charms together.

RICHARD LALOR SHIEL.



ELIZA O'NEILL
As Belvidera.

ELIZA O'NEILL

When the curtain fell on the last act of 'Romeo and Juliet,' on Oct. 6, 1814, at Covent Garden, with Charles Kemble and Miss O'Neill in the titular parts, it was felt that the beautiful young Irish girl, who made her bow to London audiences that night, had begun to mount the throne so lately abdicated by the Queen of Tragedy herself. No shoulders were strong enough, or broad enough, to wear the royal robes the Siddons had dropped ; but Miss O'Neill during the few years of her reign on the English boards, was generally conceded to be her only legitimate successor. Sir Archibald Alison, Miss O'Neill's enthusiastic admirer, describes her finely chiselled, Grecian countenance, her dark glossy hair, her skin as smooth as monumental marble, her beautiful figure, her bewitching tenderness, her heartrending pathos ; and adds that she combines with these the very mental qualities fitted to bring them forth in full lustre. He does not claim for her the majesty of Mrs. Siddons, nor the stately imposing dignity of John Kemble, but he believes that she could not be excelled in the delicacy and pathos with which she invested the last scenes of such parts as *Desdemona*, *Juliet* and *Belvidera*. Her *Mrs. Haller* to the *Stranger* of Kemble, he asserts, was "a spectacle such as no one ever saw

before, as no one will ever see again, and which did not leave a dry eye in the whole audience."

The new Queen not only received the homage of the laity, but counted her loyal subjects among the professional peers of her realm. During Miss O'Neill's theatrical career no other *Juliet* was tolerated in the London theatres ; and she had in the metropolis but one *Romeo*, Charles Kemble. Macready in his 'Reminiscences' has crowned her with laurels ; and in her 'Records of a Girlhood,' Fanny Kemble shows how highly Miss O'Neill was regarded, as actress and woman, in the household of her London *Montagues* : — "She was expressly devised for a representative victim ; she had, too, a rare endowment for her special range of characters, in an easy excited superficial sensibility, which caused her to cry, as she once said, 'buckets full,' and enabled her to exercise the (to most men) irresistible influence of a beautiful woman in tears." Mrs. Kemble tells a pleasant story of Miss O'Neill, long after she had retired, meeting Charles Kemble, by chance in a private parlor, and at his cry, "Ah, dear *Juliet*," embracing him with a pretty, half real, half dramatic, tenderness, quaint yet touching in white-haired *Montagues* and *Capulets* of sixty-five and seventy-five ; who had loved and lived and died together—on the stage—almost half a century before. Miss O'Neill also played *Belvidera*, *Desdemona*, *Katherine* (in 'Taming of the Shrew'), *Sigismunda*, *Lady Teazle*, *Jane Shore*, *Mrs. Oakley*, *Queen Katherine*, *Bianca*, *Constance*, and *Euphrasia*; and she was the original *Florinda* in Sheil's 'Apostate,' (May 3, 1817), with Young as *Malec*, Charles Kemble as *Hemeya*, and Macready as *Pescara*. She

also created the parts of *Balamira* and *Evadne* (Feb. 10, 1819), written for her by Shiel in whose breast she is said to have inspired an honest and tender passion which she could not return except by immortalizing these creations of his brain.

Miss O'Neill, if not literally born upon the stage, was rocked in the wings, and knew nothing but the life of an actress until her retirement at the age of twenty-nine. Her mother has left no record. Her father was the manager of a small strolling company in Ireland, of whom strange stories are told. He belonged peculiarly to his class and his country ; eccentric, devil-mecare, with a wild, rough humor, and a way entirely his own of treating his audiences and his subordinates. In his company in the year 1803, and when she was about twelve years of age, "O'Neill's Eliza" made her first public appearance in the town of Drogheda as the *Duke of York* in 'Richard III.' In 1808 she was at Belfast, and for two seasons was exceedingly popular in the towns of the North of Ireland. In 1810 she was introduced, by accident, to Dublin audiences, at the Crow Street Theatre, as related by Michael Kelly in his 'Reminiscences,' and on the authority of Mr. Jones, the manager of that house. Miss Walstein, who was the leading actress in the Irish capital for several seasons, refused to appear as *Juliet*, without an increase of salary, which Mr. Jones felt was unreasonable and unwarranted. He was about to close his house in disgust, when the "girl from the North" was introduced to him, given the part at short notice, and became at once the pet and the idol of the Dublin stage ; driving Miss Walstein from that town, as she eclipsed her entirely in London, a few seasons later.

The O'Neill remained in Dublin for three years, filling Woffington's place in the hearts of her countrymen, as she was to fill the place of Siddons in hearts over the channel. She is certainly the greatest Irish actress since Woffington's time.

John Kemble seeing her in the summer of 1814, and greatly impressed by her beauty and talents, offered her an engagement at Covent Garden with the result as shown above. She was engaged for three years, at salaries of £15, £16, and £17 a week, increasing each season ; but her manager generously broke his contracts with her, when he discovered how great was her attraction, and how much money she drew to the treasury ; and gave her a sum that enabled her on her marriage to settle £30,000 of her own savings upon her family, whom she never neglected nor forgot.

On July 19, 1819, Miss O'Neill was announced as *Mrs. Haller*—"her last performance before Christmas." But before Christmas she was married to Wm. Wrixon Becher, M. P., and never performed on the London stage again. She became Lady Becher upon the accession of her husband to the baronetcy in 1831, and died on her estates in Ireland, Oct. 29, 1872, at a ripe old age, which was as beautiful and pure as all her life had been.

LAURENCE HUTTON.

There is a very pretty Irish girl here [Dublin], with a small touch of the brogue on her tongue. She has much quiet talent, and some genius. With a little expense and some trouble, we might make her "an

object" for John Bull's admiration in the juvenile tragedy. They call her here ('tis in verse, for they are all poets—all Tom Moores here !) 'The Dove,' in contradistinction to her rival, a Miss Walstein, whom they designate 'The Eagle.' I have sounded the fair lady on the subject of a London engagement. She proposes to append a very long family, a whole clan, of O'Neills to her engagement; to which I have given a decided negative. If she accept the offered terms, I shall sign, seal and ship herself and clan off from Cork direct. She is very pretty, and so in fact is her brogue; which, by the bye, she only uses in conversation: she totally forgets it when with Shakspere, and other illustrious companions.

JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE, 1814, quoted in Mrs. C. Baron Wilson's 'Our Actresses,' vol. i., pp. 63-4.

Saw Miss O'Neill in *Isabella*. She was, as Amyot well said, "a hugging actress." Sensibility shown in grief and fondness was her forte,—her only talent. She is praised for her death scenes, but they are the very opposite of Kean's, of which I have spoken. In Kean you see the ruling passion strong in death—that is the passion of the individual. Miss O'Neill exhibits the suffering common to all who are in pain. To imitate death closely is disgusting.

HENRY CRABB ROBINSON: 'Reminiscences,' Dec. 23, 1814, vol. i., chap. 17.

Miss O'Neill was a remarkable instance of self-abandonment in acting. She forgot everything for the time but her assumed character. She was an

entirely modest woman, yet in acting with her I have been nearly smothered with her kisses.

W. C. MACREADY, quoted in Lady Pollock's 'Macready as I Knew Him,' p. 29.

My father now changed places with me, he coming to the public weeks at Dumfries and I proceeding to Leicester, where I was to act a month and close the season. Fortune seemed still to be on my side, and the whole period of my stay there was one unbroken course of prosperous work. It was during my sojourn here that a young actress, who had been a great favorite in Dublin, made her appearance in London at Covent Garden, and at once united all voices in her praise. Her beauty, grace, simplicity, and tenderness were the theme of every tongue. Crowds were nightly disappointed in finding room in the theatre to witness her enchanting personations. *Juliet*, *Belvidera*, *Mrs. Beverley*, *Mrs. Haller*, were again realities upon the scene, attested with enthusiasm by the tears and applauding shouts of admiring thousands. The noble pathos of Siddons' transcendent genius no longer served as the grand commentary and living exponent of Shakspere's text, but in the native elegance, the feminine sweetness, the unaffected earnestness and gushing passion of Miss O'Neill the stage had received a worthy successor to her.

W. C. MACREADY : 'Reminiscences,' chap. 4, 1813-14.

In its outward graces how different was the excellence which, a night or two after, excited my enthusiastic admiration when Shakspere's *Juliet* made her entry on the scene in the person of Miss O'Neill !

Our seats in the orchestra of Covent Garden gave me the opportunity of noting every slightest flash of emotion or shade of thought that passed over her countenance. The charming picture she presented was one that time could not efface from the memory. It was not altogether the matchless beauty of form and face, but the spirit of perfect innocence and purity that seemed to glisten in her speaking eyes and breathe from her chiselled lips. To her might justly be ascribed the negative praise, in my mind the highest commendation that, as an artist, man or woman can receive, of a total absence of any approach to affectation. There was in her look, voice, and manner an artlessness, an apparent unconsciousness (so foreign to the generality of stage performers) that riveted the spectator's gaze ; but when, with altered tones and eager glance, she inquired, as he lingerly left her, the name of *Romeo* of the *Nurse*, bade her go and learn it, the revolution in her whole being was evident, anticipating the worse,—

—If he be married,
My grave is like to be my wedding-bed.

Ibid., chap. 5, 1814-15.

I can truly say I never knew what acting was until I saw her. The play was the 'Gamester.' I cried like a school-boy to the great amusement of the John Bulls who were around me in the pit. All night my dreams did homage to the astonishing powers of the actress ; and my first waking imaginations of this morning still dwelt on the hysterical laugh when she was carried off the stage. I absolutely dread to see her again.

GEORGE TICKNOR : 'Life and Letters,' vol. i., *chap. 3, 1815.*

We both agreed that were you in England, you would infallibly fall in love with this ‘divine perfection of a woman !’ She is to my very eyes the most soul-subduing actress I ever saw; I do not mean from her personal charms, which are great, but from the truth, force and pathos of her acting. I have never been so completely melted, moved and overcome at a theatre as by her performances.

WASHINGTON IRVING: ‘Life and Letters,’ vol. i., chap. 19, Dec. 28, 1815.

Our rehearsals, now my regular school of practice, brought us to the night of the play’s representation, May 3d, to which I went with fear and trembling ; but I knew what I had to do, and I did it. The tragedy obtained a complete success. Young acted admirably the old Moor *Malec*; Charles Kemble was spirited, chivalrous, and gallant in *Hemeya*; and Miss O’Neill, beautiful in *Florinda*. In her apology for her love of *Hemeya* the words seemed to flow in music from her chiselled lips. It was the perfection of elocution. In the fourth act her efforts to save her lover, and her recoil of horror from the proposals of *Pescara*, raised the enthusiasm of the audience to a tumult of applause, and the act-drop fell amidst the acclamations of the whole house.

W. C. MACREADY: ‘Reminiscences,’ chap. 10, 1817.

Our ladies are all in hysterics, our gentlemen’s hands quite blistered with clapping, and her stage companions worn to a thread with standing up like chairs in a children’s country dance, while she alone commands the attention of such audiences as Bath

never witnessed till now. The box-keeper said last night that the numbers Kean drew after him were nothing to it.

MRS. PIOZZI: 'Autobiography,' Letters, June 18, 1818.

Miss O'Neill always wished to avoid acting characters for which she felt herself unfitted from her youth, her manner, and her want of physical force,—such as *Lady Macbeth*, *Lady Randolph*, *Queen Katherine*, *Volumnia*, etc., etc.,—and in such avoidance she showed both her prudence and good taste. But the *Belvidera* of Miss O'Neill comprised, probably, the most perfect co-operation of youth, beauty, and intellect, that the stage has exhibited within our memory. The melting power of pathetic tenderness was her peculiar attribute, and it was this which always called forth the glowing admiration of an audience. It was to this quality of ardent feeling, that her chief excellence was to be referred.

MRS. C. BARON WILSON: 'Our Actresses,' vol. i., p. 71.

To MISS O'NEILL:—

Madam,—I am indebted to your great talents for the success of this tragedy. The part of *Adelaide* was written for you; in adapting it, I endeavored to combine beauty, innocence and feeling, as I knew that your representation of such a character would not be an effort of art, but the spontaneous effusions of nature. I submit it to the public with a diffidence which the success of its representation has not tended to remove; for I am sensible that whatever beauty it

appeared to possess was reflected from you, the representative of *Adelaide*.

RICHARD LALOR SHIEL: Dedication to 'Adelaide, or the Emigrants.'

I admired greatly what little I saw of her; but though she towered far above any actress of the present day, she scarcely belonged to our school. It was chaste, simple, beautiful acting, but it did not amount to that which perfect tragedy requires: it deeply interested and affected, but it did not appeal, astonish, overwhelm and reduce all other feelings to littleness and nothingness in its presence.

WILLIAM ROBSON: the 'Old Playgoer.' Letter 6.

Dined with Lady Essex. She told him of a curious thing that happened to Lady Becher (Miss O'Neill). Some time after her marriage she was at a ball when a lady accosted her, and said she was very desirous of making her acquaintance, in order to thank her for the whole happiness of her life. Lady Becher, somewhat astonished, asked her what she meant; when the lady told her that her husband had been a confirmed gambler, but that Miss O'Neill's performance of *Mrs. Beverley* had made so extraordinary and lasting an impression upon him that, on returning from the theatre, he registered an oath never to play or bet again, which he had religiously observed; and she considered that her happiness was entirely owing to her admirable performance.

HENRY GREVILLE: 'Diary,' Jan. 18, 1854.

WILLIAM HENRY WEST BETTY.

1791—1874.

The curtain drawn—a PRODIGY APPEARS,
Bid sceptics to thy *scenic* banquet come,
Conviction yields assent, and Envy's *dumb*.
UNEQUALLED YOUTH ! report falls short of thee
To judge thee fairly, we must *hear and see*.

* * * * *

Acting 'tis not, for NATURE'S CHILD THOU ART !
Thine attitudes, so graceful, and so true,
All eyes are pleased, all hearts are charmed with you.
Would SCULPTURE form—APOLLO BELVIDERE,
She need not roam to France—the MODEL'S HERE !

* * * * *

Well may the House with rapturous shouts resound,
Ne'er at *thy years* was *such an Actor* found.
NATURE has challenged ART, her power to see,
And mocks her vain attempts to rival THEE.
Nor are her choicest gifts bestowed in vain,
Ne'er shall we look upon *thy like* again.
Nor need we fear THY WREATH *too high* to raise,
We cannot flatter WORTH *surpassing praise* !

MR. FISHER, of the Inner Temple. 1804.



WILLIAM HENRY WEST BETTY
As Young Norval in "Douglas."

WILLIAM HENRY WEST BETTY.

The exact position of the Infant Phenomena on the stage it is not easy to determine. They occupy, perhaps, the neutral ground between the monstrosity and the amateur, without belonging to either class, or to art. As being professional, though in embryo, they cannot share exemption from the severe tests of criticism with those who only play at being players ; and as being human, though undeveloped, they can not be judged as leniently as are the educated pigs or trained monkeys, from whom some disciples of Darwin might claim them to have been evolved.

In no case is the Phenomenon to be emulated, to be encouraged, or to be admired. How great a nuisance the average prodigy is to his audiences all habitual theatre-goers know ; how much of a nuisance he is to his fellow-players Nicholas Nickleby has shown ; and what a bitter burden he is likely to become to himself, his own experiences, if he lives to have experiences, will certainly prove. Loved by the gods—of the gallery—the Phenomenon, happily for himself and for his profession, as a rule, dies young. He does not educate the masses, he does not advance art, he does nothing which it is the high aim of the legitimate actor to do, he does not even amuse ; he merely displays precocity that is likely to sap his very life ; he

probably supports a family at an age when he needs all the support and protection that can be given him, and if he does not meet a premature death, he rarely, very rarely, fulfills in any way the promise of his youth.

A decided distinction, however, should be made between the phenomenal young actor or actress who walks upon the stage in leading parts—a child *Richard*, or an infant *Richmond*—and the youthful member of the company, born of dramatic people, who never attempting what is beyond his years or his stature, plays *Young York* or *Young Clarence* to support his father in leading rôles, says his few lines, gets his little round of applause, is not noticed by the critics, and goes home, like a good boy, to his mother and his bed. It is as natural for the child of an actor to go upon the stage, as it is for the son of a sailor to follow the sea. But while the young mariner, put before the mast, is taught the rudiments of his profession by the hardest and roughest of experiences, the “young Roscius” is given command of the dramatic ship before he can box the dramatic compass; or tell the difference, in the nautical drama, between ‘Black Eyed Susan’ and the ‘Tempest.’

Master Betty, the most remarkable and successful of Phenomena, was also one of the most melancholy and ridiculous figures in the whole history of the stage. He was not so much absurd in himself, as the cause of extravagant imbecility in others. He was born at, or near, Shrewsbury, on Sept. 13, 1791. The following year he was carried to the North of Ireland, and in the summer of 1802 was taken to see Mrs. Siddons play *Elvira*, at Belfast. With the performance and

the performer he became "rapt and inspired," and possessed with that passion for the stage which nothing but cruel failure, or death, has ever been known to extinguish in child or man. On Aug. 16 in the following year he was permitted by his father to appear in public at the Belfast Theatre, choosing the character of *Osman* in the tragedy of 'Zara.' He exhibited not the slightest sign of fear or embarrassment, and although only eleven years of age went through his part without confusion or mistake. The applause was tumultuous and long continued ; and thus suddenly arose the star which was destined to outshine every other planet in the firmament, until it was as suddenly eclipsed forever, by the shadow of its own mature mediocrity. On Nov. 28 Betty made his first appearance in Dublin, at the Crow Street Theatre, as *Young Norval*. He was carried triumphantly to Cork, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester ; and on Dec. 1, 1804, in the character of *Selim* in 'Barbarossa,' at Drury Lane, and at a salary of £50 a night, he set all London mad.

The excitement he created has only been equalled by the craze over the South Sea Bubble. Hundreds gathered under the piazza as early as ten o'clock in the mornings ; when the theatre doors were opened the crush was so great that women, and even men, were killed by the crowd ; the silence when he was on the stage was so deep and the interest so intense that his slightest whisper could be heard in every part of the house ; the First Gentleman in Europe led the applause ; the receipts at the box-office were considered fabulous ; his own fortune was made in a single

season ; lords and ladies, and peers of the realm were among his worshipers ; royal dukes were proud to call him friend ; George the Third and his Queen gave him an audience ; Mr. Home, the author of ‘*Douglas*,’ declared him a wonderful being who for the first time had realized the creator’s conception of *Young Norval*; he was considered greater than Garrick in Garrick’s own parts ; John Kemble, Mrs. Siddons, Mrs. Jordan, Cooke and Kean played to empty benches when at the rival house ; bulletins were issued, when he was ill, stating the condition of his health ; the University of Cambridge selected him as the subject of a prize ode ; and Parliament itself adjourned, on motion of Mr. Pitt, to see him play *Hamlet*, at Drury Lane ; than which no higher compliment could have been paid by England to mortal man.

Betty played alternately at Covent Garden and Drury Lane, his salary after the first performance being raised to £100 a night. And the gross receipts for twenty-eight nights were £17,210.11, (about \$86,000). His parts, during his infancy, were *Norval*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo*, *Frederic* (in ‘*Lover’s Vows*’), *Octavian* (in the ‘*Mountaineers*’), *Rolla*, *Tancred*, *Richard III.*, *Osman*, in ‘*Zara*,’ and *Selim* ; and some idea of the intelligence of the baby who was “Cooke, Kemble, Holman, Garrick all in one” may be gathered from the fact that he studied and learned and played the part of *Hamlet* in four days ! London recovered from its madness before the beginning of Betty’s second season ; the provinces growing saner by degrees, were not cured for two or three years. He retired from the stage at Bath, March 26, 1808, at the age of seventeen ; and was entered a Fellow Commoner at Christ’s College,

Cambridge, in the summer of the same year. In the month of February, 1812, Betty reappeared upon the boards at Bath, as the *Earl of Essex*; he played occasionally in London, more frequently in the provinces, but with indifferent success, and Aug. 9, 1824, at Southampton he finally quit the stage. That he was a commonplace actor during the twelve years of his professional life as a man, there seems to be no question. He died in London on Aug. 24, 1874, after having outlived himself for half a century, and his own fame for seventy years.

LAURENCE HUTTON.

The engagement of Master Betty, the "Young Roscius," occasioned a great schism between the Drury Lane and Covent Garden proprietors; each had their agents, who followed him to various places where he was acting. A very voluminous correspondence took place between principals and agents, and, at last, the arbitration was left to the Rev. Bate Dudley, whose decision was, "*that they each had an equal claim;*" the "Roscius" was therefore to play six nights at each theatre, alternately, at fifty guineas a night; a clear benefit at the end of every six nights; Master Betty to commence at Covent Garden. He appeared in *Achmet*, in "Barbarossa."

The average of the first twenty-four performances was £609 per night. After completing his engagements of twelve nights at each theatre, a fresh one was made in the Drury Lane proprietary, at *one hundred guineas a night*. He played during the season

fifty-seven nights ; the sum total of receipts amounted to £32,416, and the average £586 per night.

GEORGE RAYMOND : 'Life of Elliston,' *period iii.*,
vol. ii.

The most extraordinary circumstance, which occurs in the whole history of the stage, took place at this time—a boy of the name of Betty, born in 1791, displayed a genius for acting, which considering his age, was really astonishing, but his partisans, not content with saying he was a boy of great promise, insisted that he actually was at this moment a first-rate performer, or that at least he would soon eclipse all competitors,—Master Betty had played with great applause in Ireland, Scotland, at Birmingham, etc. On this evening [Covent Garden, Dec. 1, 1804,] the audience was all impatience till the first act was over ; as Master Betty was not to appear till the second—when he did appear his success was complete—and the caresses bestowed upon him off the stage were hardly less extravagant than the applause he received on it—that the public should have been deceived on this occasion is not peculiarly to be wondered at, similar instances had occurred before, though not to the same degree—but that some persons of the best abilities in the kingdom, and even some good judges of theatricals, should have been carried away with the stream, is strange indeed.

P. GENEST : 'History of the Stage,' *vol. vii.*, pp. 659–60.

Suddenly a wonderful boy, a miracle of beauty, grace, and genius, who had acted in Belfast and

Edinburgh, became the theme of all discourse. My father had brought him to England, and his first engagement was at Birmingham, where crowded houses applauded his surprising powers to the very echo. In London, at both Drury Lane and Covent Garden Theatres, throughout the whole country, "the young Roscius" became a rage, and in the *furore* of public admiration the invasion ceased to be spoken of. He acted two nights at Leicester, and on a half-holiday, my cousin Birch having sent a note to excuse me and his eldest son from the afternoon's callings-over at my father's request, Tom Birch and myself were smuggled into a chaise, and reached Leicester in time for the play—'Richard III.' The house was crowded. John Kemble and H. Harris, son of the Patentee of Covent Garden, sat in the stage box immediately behind us. I remember John Kemble's handkerchief strongly scented of lavender, and his observation, in a very compassionate tone, "Poor boy! he is very hoarse." I could form little judgment of the performance, which excited universal enthusiasm, and in the tempest of which we were of course borne along. In subsequent engagements with my father we became playfellows, and off the stage W. H. West Betty was a boy with boys, as full of spirits, fun, and mischief as any of his companions, though caressed, fondled, and idolized by peeresses, and actually besieged for a mere glimpse of him by crowds at his hotel door. An instance of the "madness that ruled the hour" was given at Dunchurch, where he stopped to dine and sleep, being prevented from acting at Coventry in passion Week by Cornwalis, Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry. One of the leading families in the county,

who were on their way to Coventry to see him, were stopped by the news at Dunchurch. The lady begged and entreated the landlord to get her a sight of "the young Roscius." She would "give anything." The landlord, unwilling to disoblige his patrons, suggested that there was but one way in which her wish could be gratified : "Mr. and Mrs. Betty and their son were just going to dinner, and if she chose to carry in one of the dishes she could see him, but there was no other way." The lady, very grateful in her acknowledgments, took the dish, and made one of the waiters at table. I mention this as one among the numerous anecdotes of his popularity. The Prince of Wales made him handsome presents, and in short he engrossed all tongues.

W. C. MACREADY : 'Reminiscences,' *chap. i*, 1793–1808.

His figure is slight but elegant and extremely youthful. He is not particularly tall of his age, nor does he appear older than the register of his birth reports him to be. His complexion is fair, his eyes blue, his face sweetly interesting, but not what may be exactly termed beautiful. His action is graceful, chaste and varied; but not redundant. He appears to possess a complete knowledge of stage business, treads the boards with firmness and dignity; pays the most critical attention to his brother actors; and, with the exception of Mr. Kemble, is the most perfect master of attitudes of any performer at the London theatres. Such a combination of grace and elegance, considering his youthful years, lives not in the annals of the English stage; and should his future education

experience the attention which it merits, and his physical powers acquire force with age, he cannot fail of becoming the most brilliant ornament of the profession which he has adopted.

T. HARRAL: the 'Infant Roscius,' London, 1805.

In the important character of *Hamlet*, which has frequently been considered as the criterion of theatrical skill, Master Betty exhibits with but few exceptions, every beauty which depends upon natural and animated feelings, on chaste and refined taste, or prompt and accurate conception. . . . In his performance of *Romeo* Master Betty is particularly happy. In the garden of the *Capulets* when he addresses *Juliet* in the balcony, nothing can be more tender, graceful and attractive than the youthful Roscius. In the *rencontre* with *Tibalt* he is scarcely less admirable. His forbearance in the beginning of the affray, and his generous indignation on the death of *Mercutio* as chaste and spirited as can be wished. His dying scene, as is usual in other characters, is exquisitely pathetic and impressive. It would be presumption to exclaim with the Italian poet —

Natura lo fece, et poi ruppa la stampa,

but, "take him for all in all" we never expect to look upon his like again.

The 'Young Roscius,' New York, 1806, pp. 130, 133-4.

This was the season [1804-5] when Master Betty made his first appearance on the London boards, and was equally the magnet of attraction at each of the great theatres.

The popularity of that baby-faced boy, who possessed not even the elements of a good actor, was an hallucination in the public mind, and a disgrace to our theatrical history. It enabled managers to give him sums for his childish ranting that were never accorded to the acting of a Garrick or a Siddons. His bust was stuck up in marble by the best sculptors ; he was painted by Opie and Northcote ; and the verses that were poured out upon him were in a style of idolatrous adulation. Actors and actresses of merit were obliged to appear on the stage with this minion, and even to affect the general taste for him, in order to avoid giving offence. But Mrs. Siddons never condescended to act with him, nor even concealed her disgust at the popular infatuation. She went to see him, however, and gave him all the praise that he deserved. At the end of the play, the late Lord Aberdeen came into her box and told her that that boy, Betty, would eclipse everything which had been called acting in England. "My lord," she answered, "he is a very clever, pretty boy, but nothing more."

THOMAS CAMPBELL : 'Life of Mrs. Siddons' *vol. ii., chap. II.*

Historians of the stage must blush a little to have to acknowledge that an enthusiasm exceeding what was excited by Garrick or Siddons was caused by a little Belfast boy of thirteen—the famous Master Betty—and that his twenty-eight nights' playing brought Sheridan nearly £20,000 receipts. It was not a little mortifying for Kemble, when this lad came to his theatre to have to make arrangements gravely for "mounting" all the important tragedies, in which the

players were nearly twice the height of the hero, and especially mortifying it must have been for the actors of the great theatre themselves, who had to minister to a mere prodigy. Mrs. Inchbald was present at the first appearance of the Phenomenon, and was greatly fatigued by his measured "preaching-like tones" during the earlier scenes. She then went behind the scenes, and in her vivacious manner describes the crowd of rapturous admirers who were congregated there—some vociferating that Garrick had come to life again, while the more sagacious said that the bottle conjurer had been revived. She owned, however, that in the later acts he exhibited great fire and spirit, and an impassioned variety. The lady added this lively comment:—"This is a clever little boy, and had I never seen boys act I might have thought him exquisite."

PERCY FITZGERALD: 'The Kembles,' vol. ii., chap. 4.

While Young Betty was in all his glory, I went with Fox and Mrs. Fox, after dining with them in Arlington Street, to see him act *Hamlet*; and, during the play-scene, Fox, to my infinite surprise, said, "This is finer than Garrick." How wise it was of Kemble and Mrs. Siddons quietly to withdraw from the stage during the Betty furor, and then as quietly to return to it as if nothing unusual had occurred.

SAMUEL ROGERS: 'Recollections of the Table Talk of.'

Northcote then spoke of "the boy," as he always called him (Master Betty). He asked if I had ever seen him act, and I said, "Yes, and was one of his

admirers." He answered : "Oh ! yes, it was such a beautiful effusion of natural sensibility ; and then that graceful play of the limbs in youth gave such an advantage over every one about him. Humphrey's artist said, he had never seen the little Apollo off the pedestal before.

Wm. HAZLITT : 'Conversations of Northcote,' p. 23.

Feb. 15 [1812], 'Earl of Essex.' *Essex*—Betty, his first appearance in public these four years. Betty came to Bath without any intention of acting—he was much solicited to return to the stage by some ladies, and he consented to do so—there was no alteration in him, except that he was now grown a stout young man—he was much frightened when he first came on, which was by no means to his discredit but rather to the contrary. It would have been unfair to have given a decided opinion about Betty on his first performance, but after he had acted *Hamlet*, it might be said, without any scruple, that he was the worst actor who ever came before the public (except in a part for trial) as a first-rate performer.

P. GENEST : 'History of the Stage,' vol. viii., p. 320.

Some little time previous (I think in the winter) W. H. West Betty, the *ci-devant* young Roscius, after leaving Cambridge, reappeared on the stage at Bath, where he played through a long and very successful engagement, much followed and caressed by the fashionables of the place. His figure no longer retained its symmetrical proportions, having grown bulky and heavy, but his face was very handsome. He, with well-calculated judgment, had determined on gleaning

what he could from the country theatres before hazard-ing a venture in presence of a London audience. Be-ing announced to perform two nights at Wolverhampton, my father, with the expectation that he would joyfully welcome his former playfellow, sent me over to see him, and propose an engagement at Birming-ham.

The coach sat me down at his inn some time before his arrival, for which I waited with some impatience. He was to act *Achmet* that same evening, but there was no excitement in the town on that occasion. At about three o'clock the waiter gave me notice that Mr. Betty was coming, and I hastened out of the coffee-room to meet him, as he drove in his tandem into the gates. I introduced myself with all the heart-inness of an old acquaintance, and was somewhat mortified by his cool reception of me. He gave directions about his carriage and horses, and went to the room prepared for him ; I, a coach passenger, and one of little note, retired to the coffee-room, where I ordered dinner, and sat chewing the cud of my slighted ad-vances. In a little time, as if he had bethought him-self, he came into the room, and with an altered man-ner entered into conversation. On seeing the prepa-rations for my dinner, he requested me to order it into his room, that we might talk over matters without fear of interruption. With this arrangement we discussed the subject of the proposed engagement, and he agreed to give my father the earliest notice of the time at his disposal. At night I saw him act, but seemingly in a careless way, the house being but indifferent. After some weeks he came to Birmingham, and played to moderately good receipts a round of his characters.

His subsequent appearance in London was a failure, but I am disposed to think his talents were not fairly appreciated. It seemed as if the public resented on the grown man the extravagance of the idolatry they had blindly lavished on the boy. There was a peculiarity in his level elocution that was not agreeable, a sort of sing-song and a catch in his voice that suggested to the listener the delivery of words learned by heart, not flowing from the impulse or necessity of the occasion ; but when warmed into passion he became possessed with the spirit of the scene, and in witnessing as I have done his illustrations of passages with all the originality and fire of genius, the conviction was pressed upon me that if he had not to his prejudice the comparison of his boyish triumphs, and the faulty manner derived from frequent careless repetition, he would have maintained a distinguished position in his maturer years.

W. C. MACREADY : 'Reminiscences,' *chap. 3, 1811-12.*

Betty, who continued his tour through the country, was engaged for a limited number of nights. He dined with us on the day of his arrival, and in the evening I was to act *Frederic* in 'Lovers' Vows.' The servant had been sent up-stairs to get a pocket-handkerchief for me to put with my dress, which was to be sent to the theatre, and brought me down a white one. I asked the man, how could he suppose a common soldier, as *Frederic* is, would have a white pocket-handkerchief, ordering him to bring me a colored one, on which Betty exclaimed, "Oh, my boy ! you think of such things as these, do you ?"

Ibid., chap. iv., 1813-14.

Young Betty, the “Roscius” that had been, was our first star. He was of my age, within a month one way or the other ; a great, lubberly, overgrown, fat-faced, good-tempered fellow, with very little talent, and first tolerated as a man by those who were ashamed to confess they were deceived in thinking him a divinity when he was a boy.

JOE COWELL : ‘Thirty Years Among the Players,’
part i., chap. 9.

After Vandenhoff we had Mr. William H. Betty, erst “the young Roscius.” In his boyhood he had won fame and money by his representation of the heroes of sundry tragedies. His youth and personal beauty, and the intelligent manner in which he recited, following an anxious mother’s instructions, caused him to be much patronized. As he advanced in life, however, he realized the ordinarily fatal results of precocity. His style and his face became heavy, and his speech lacked music ; he had neither genius, nor inspiration. The title “Roscius” was altogether misapplied, for he had none of the reputed qualities of the famous Roman actor left. I played *Alonzo* to his *Zango*, but imbibed no professional sympathy.

Autobiography of an Actor, Anon., in the *Theatre*, June, 1883.

I knew almost as little of the drama as “the young Roscius” himself. Luckily I had the advantage of him in knowing how unfit *he* was for his office ; and probably he thought me as much so, though he could not have argued upon it ; for I was in the minority respecting his merits, and the balance was then

trembling on the beam : the *News*, I believe, hastened the settlement of the question. I wish, with all my heart, we had let him alone, and he had got a little more money. However, he obtained enough to create him a provision for life. His position, which appeared so brilliant at first, had a remarkable cruelty in it. Most men begin life with struggles, and have their vanity sufficiently knocked about the head and shoulders to make their kinder fortunes the more welcome. Mr. Betty had his sugar first, and his physic afterward. He began life with a double childhood, with a new and extraordinary felicity added to the natural enjoyments of his age ; and he lived to see it speedily come to nothing, and to be taken for an ordinary person. I am told that he acquiesces in his fate, and agrees that the town was mistaken. If so, he is no ordinary person still, and has as much right to our respect for his good sense, as he is declared, on all hands, to deserve it for his amiabilities.

LEIGH HUNT : 'Autobiography,' vol. i., chap. 7.

THE END.

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